AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CO-ORDINATOR (SENCo) ROLE IN WALES: THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROFESSIONALS IDENTIFIED THROUGH CASE STUDIES

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education (Professional Doctorate)

Cardiff School of Education
Cardiff Metropolitan University

June 2013
CONTENTS

Declaration ........................................ V
Acknowledgements ............................... VI
Abstract .......................................... VII
Abbreviations and Glossary ................... VIII
List of figures ..................................... IX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>The problem: the National professional context</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>The aim of this research: research questions and objectives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Managing the research within the context of the broader WAG pilot.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Research within your own organisation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>The national professional context</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>The role of the SENCo</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1</td>
<td>The Context – the Educational landscape for SEN</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Leading educational change</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>The importance of ‘culture’ in successfully managing change</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Developments in England</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Literature Review conclusions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 The research approach

3.1 • Choosing the research methodology 61
3.2 • Qualitative and quantitative research 65
3.3 • Using a mixed methods approach 67
3.4 • Quality assurance in research 69
3.5 • Choosing the research methodology within the context of educational research 72
3.6 • Choosing the research methods 78
3.7 • The use of documentation 86
3.8 • Implementing the research methodology and methods 92
3.8.1 • Collecting baseline data through questionnaire 96
3.8.2 • Developing and piloting the questionnaire 99
3.9 • Developing the research into case studies 104
3.10 • Selecting the case study schools 108
3.11 • Developing the case study interview process 109
3.12 • Research approach - conclusions 113

4 Reporting the results

4.1 • Analysis from the questionnaire data 116
4.1.1 • Basic data – title, pay, experience and qualifications 117
4.1.2 • Place of the current role in 28 settings – line management, place in school structure 122
4.1.3 • Perceptions of the current post holders – status, duties, responsibilities 126
4.2 • Collecting the evidence from case study settings 131
4.3 • Introduction to phase 2 results 137
4.4 • Case study X results 140
4.4.1 • School context 140
4.4.2 • Stimulus for change 141
4.4.3 • Response to change 143
4.4.4 • Impact/outcomes of change 146
4.5 • Case study Y 147
4.5.1 • School context 147
4.5.2 • Stimulus for change 148
4.5.3 • Response to change 149
4.5.4 • Impact/outcomes of change 151
5. Evaluating the case study research evidence

5.1 Comparing and contrasting the stimulus for change
5.2 Comparing and contrasting the process of change
5.3 Evaluating the impact/outcomes of change

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Achieving the research aim and objectives
6.2 Recommendations and discussions for future policy
6.3 Personal reflections

Appendices

A Information about the research project
B Consent form
C Transcript of interview 1 (excerpts)
D Generic questionnaire for national pilot
E Refined questionnaire for the research
F Final questionnaire for this research
G Data collection summary sheet
H Interview questions for school leaders
I Interview questions for serving SENCos
J Coded interview transcript (excerpts)

References

Professional Development Portfolio (PDP)
DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ...................................................................... (candidate)

Date ..........................................................................

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references.

Signed ................................................................. (candidate)

Date ..........................................................................

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed ................................................................. (candidate)

Date ..........................................................................
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work started with the work of Denzin and Lincoln (1998) in expressing the belief that the social sciences are ‘founded on the study of experiences’. I am grateful to all those practitioners who, by sharing their experiences, have contributed to my being able to learn from them and develop this work.

These people are too numerous to thank but it would be remiss of me not to give particular thanks to Martin Seagrove, the Project Manager for the broader WG project without whom this journey would have been neither as productive, or as enjoyable. Thanks also to Liz Jones my counterpart project lead who shared a number of car journeys that kept me going.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisors, Bill Gwilym and Sian Williams who have freely shared their professional knowledge and skills. Even more important to me has been their ability to share their humour and encouragement in so many different ways along this learning journey. It has been a joy to belong to their network of associates.

Finally, thanks to my family and friends for their support and encouragement. To Neil for his patience and love and belief that I would complete this work even when I wasn’t sure. Lastly to my amazing children, Jay and Beth, who continue to be the reason I get out of bed each day.
Abstract

The current statutory framework in Wales for supporting learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is centred on the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). No research has been undertaken in Wales into the nature of the current role, the duties and responsibilities or the factors that impact on their effectiveness to undertake the role. This is what this research aimed to address.

The intention was to provide the Welsh Government (WG) with evidence to help identify the strengths and challenges with the current statutory arrangements regarding this key role. It would support the identification of the impact which any statutory changes might potentially have on practice in secondary schools in Wales. Research into the factors that impact on the current role would make a significant contribution to the unfolding professional debate and contribute to a way forward for this complex agenda.

In my professional role, I had an involvement with the developing national agenda. This led to me developing a personal and professional interest in ensuring there was a better understanding of current practice that could serve to inform projected changes in legislation.

This research investigated the current secondary SENCo role in two large Local Authorities in South East Wales. A case study approach was employed using semi-structured questionnaires and interviews over a six month period.

The research findings support a recommendation that before any revision to legislation takes place, there should be an examination of the current demands on practitioners within the current statutory framework. A shared understanding of what is meant by effective practice and an evaluation of what effective practices currently exist may help shape better practice across Wales. It is also recommended that there should be greater national clarity regarding expectations on what any appointed post holder is intended to achieve in the role.
### Abbreviations and Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALN</td>
<td>Additional Learning Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADEW</td>
<td>The national Association for Directors of Education in Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWCD</td>
<td>All Wales Core Data. The data that organises Welsh secondary schools into ‘families’ of similar school settings based on a range of criteria including free school meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>The Code of Practice for Education in Wales is the document that offers guidance to help implement the law in relation to learners with SEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfSE</td>
<td>Department for Skills and Education is the statutory body governing education in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM</td>
<td>Free school meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCO</td>
<td>A Legislative Competency Order was the first part of the legal process to change the law in an area of national practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASEN</td>
<td>the National Association for SEN teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASUWT</td>
<td>National Association of Schoolteachers and the Union of Women Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCSL</td>
<td>National College for School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>Professional Development Portfolio required for professional doctorate researchers as a tracking tool to monitor their progress over the research period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQA</td>
<td>Programme Quality and Accountability - A project management tool used to identify work streams and manage large or complex projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEF</td>
<td>School Effectiveness Framework. A national initiative introduced by WG that provides a framework for improving education in Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>A Special Educational Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENCO</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator is a school based required role to support the needs of learners identified with SEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of SEN</td>
<td>The Educational Act (1996) states: ‘where, in the light of a section 323 assessment, it is necessary for the LEA to determine the special educational provision which the child’s learning difficulty calls for, the LEA shall make and maintain a statement of his or her special educational needs.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAG</td>
<td>Welsh Assembly Government. From 2011 called:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WG</td>
<td>Welsh Government</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## List of figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Families of schools data</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Research relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>How this research related to WG Pilot D</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Case study research design</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>The Research Timeline Process</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>The process for developing questioning in the case studies.</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Titles in use across the schools in the sample</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Years teaching experience of serving SENCos in the sample schools</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Years holding SEN responsibilities for serving SENCos in the sample schools</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Timetabled teaching time for serving SENCos in the sample schools</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Duties most frequently demanding SENCo time</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>SENCo identified tasks</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Supporting the research write up</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1 Introduction

As Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 153) state:

The social sciences are concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and their environments, and, as such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experiences.

1.1 The problem: the national professional context

The Welsh legislative framework for supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) was outlined in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales (2002). It outlined how the needs of pupils should be identified, assessed and addressed. It also explained the processes and protocols that should be established to ensure these pupils access their educational entitlements. The principle underpinning the creation of the Code was the increased emphasis on inclusion into mainstream schools and settings. It outlined the role and responsibilities of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). Local authorities were expected to determine how centrally delivered services could best support schools, and learners, in the achievement of the agenda laid out in the Code.

In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), as it was then titled (now Welsh Government) issued a consultation document, Inclusion and Pupil Support (2006). This document laid out the context for further developments in this field by re-iterating the legal definition of a SEN, whilst introducing a broader term, Additional Learning Needs (ALN). This definition identified a number of additional groups of learners (including those with SEN), who might be vulnerable to underachievement in their education settings. This was a significant extension to the concept of groups identified as needing additional support, who were already defined in the current statute.

To enable the creation of any new statutory framework that would be needed to support this developing agenda, the Welsh Government (WG) drafted Legislative Competency Orders (LCOs), with the intention that the SEN Code of Practice would then be revised from 2012 onwards.
In a WAG briefing to Local Educational Authorities entitled, *Statements or Something Better? A Progress report* (November 2008:1) it was made clear that:

*The Welsh Assembly Government now has the legal powers to make legislative changes in the statutory framework for ALN. It intends to use these powers to ensure that, in Wales, there is effective protection of the entitlements and rights of children and young people with ALN and their families.*

In that paper, the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills confirmed that, as a result of an extensive consultation exercise on the key issues and areas needed for improvement in the current system, four pilot schemes (pilot projects A, B, C and D) would be offered to Local Education Authorities for tender. These pilots would develop the evidence base that would support the development of a new legislative framework.

In my role of Head of Achievement for the Education Service in a large South East Wales Local Authority, I secured the All Wales pilot project for pilot D – developing the role of the ALNCo – Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator. There was no definition or agreed function of this role at either a local or national level. The pilot was fundamentally linked to the impact any findings would have on the development and delivery of this key agenda in school settings. The results of these developments were intended to inform decision making at a national level on the support, training and development needs of the key professionals in this area of work.

In agreeing to be part of the pilots to support the development of the national agenda in this field, I identified that there was no current research in Wales into the role of the secondary school SENCo. A research aim was developed to undertake a concurrent piece of research with the University.

1.2 The aim of this research: research questions and objectives

At the core of the research was investigating the management of educational
change. In preparation for potential statutory change, the aim of this research was to investigate the perceptions of the effectiveness of the current role of SENCo in a number of secondary school settings in Wales. If the Welsh Government was proposing to extend the legislation to cover more ‘vulnerable’ groups of learners, then a clearer understanding of the factors that impact on the perceived effectiveness of the current role would be research that could be shared with national government and support their forward planning and policy development.

In order to achieve the research aim, I developed a series of research objectives that could be used to support the developing research. To support the achievement of the objectives and, ultimately, the research aim, the next step was to then develop the research questions that would clarify the evidence required. To support the development of the research framework the research questions were made as specific as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1) To critically review current legislation, policy, terminology and definitions in relation to the role, taking account of any empirical research already undertaken.</td>
<td>• What is the current statutory framework and is it clear?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• What (if any) research has already taken place into the role of the secondary SENCo?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What impact does politics have on the development and implementation of ‘sound’ educational policy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2) | To identify and investigate variables that impact on SENCo effectiveness in the secondary school setting. | - What are the expectations on the role of SENCo in the secondary sector?  
- Is the role clear particularly in relation to the balance of the role as leader and manager in a setting? |
| 3) | To investigate perceptions of the effectiveness of the secondary SENCo from the perspective of current post holders and school leaders and managers | - How do practitioners measure their own professional effectiveness?  
- How do head teachers and school leaders measure the effectiveness of the SENCo role? |
| 4) | To investigate and identify the current facilitators and challenges in successfully undertaking the role of SENCo identified by the current post holders. | - What impact does the head teacher and culture of the school have on the development of vision, culture and whole school practice for SEN in an institution? |
| 5) | To identify the crucial factors or aspects that impact on success. | - What factors are common across responses that may indicate what has a significant impact of effectiveness? |
| 6) | To identify the systems and processes needed to support the further development of the role. | - What recommendations can be drawn from the responses given by practitioners, settings and outcomes of the research? |
The research process started with the need to read extensively around the research area. I identified that the research would be undertaken with the secondary schools in the two Local Authorities working on the broader project, and would start by first interviewing practitioners currently responsible for the SENCo duties. This would attempt to address objective 2 – the identification of the factors that impact on the effectiveness of the current SENCo role - through the achievement of objective 3 – the perceptions of the post through the feedback of the current post holders. Through their participation, objective 4 – the identification of those factors that help or hinder them in the completion of their duties and responsibilities - would, it was hoped, be identified.

The focus of the research was on examining the perceptions of the current role as interpreted in the secondary school sector. The research intended to investigate the responsibilities and duties of the SENCo undertaken in secondary schools. It sought to identify the factors that they, and their managers, perceived impacted on their ability to efficiently and effectively undertake the duties of the role as outlined in the current code of practice. What became clear was that the research would need to identify what the definition and measure of effectiveness could be in relation to the current role. The research would then be able to contribute towards identifying any framework required to potentially extend the role of SENCo to that of ALNCo within the broader WG agenda to help support a broader group of learners identified in a number of vulnerable groups.

Once research information had been provided through questionnaires from a broad range of practitioners in the field, the research framework then proposed that the achievement of the research aim could be further supported by writing up the evidence as more detailed case studies in a smaller sample of settings chosen from the broader range of questionnaire respondents.

For this research to be a contribution to the professional field, the achievement of objectives 5 and 6 was seen as vital. If this research could
identify factors seen as ‘crucial’ to undertaking the role successfully, then systems and processes could potentially be recommended to further support the development of the role before changes to the statutory framework were completed.

As this research was running concurrent with the broader national pilot projects, it was important that I was clear where the lines of demarcation were between my professional role and participation in the national pilots, and my developing work as a new researcher.

1.3 Managing the research within the context of the broader WG pilot.

Pilot D was funded by the Welsh Government and was a two year contract awarded to Local Authorities working in partnership. Two large Welsh Education Services agreed to work in collaboration on the pilot that interested them both. The focus of the project was to ensure that a framework for the development and support of the potential role of ‘ALNCo’ could be proposed. The challenge for the pilot project was that the Welsh Government introduced the term ALNCo into the pilot specification without checking what the national understanding was of the term. It became clear that this would need to be clarified as soon as possible.

Although working together was due to the identification of a mutual interest, it was of potential benefit to the project that two large Local Authorities could collaborate on the agenda together. The Local Authorities had access to the secondary schools in these Local Authorities, 28 in total, which represented over 10 per cent of the secondary schools in Wales.

How representative the sample schools were against the secondary sector in Wales was confirmed against the All Wales Core Data sets - statistical information regarding secondary schools in Wales produced by Welsh Government as part of the school effectiveness framework (SEF). The data sets compared the performance of schools against ‘families’ of schools facing broadly similar challenge based on a number of contextual factors including socio economic background (FSM) and number of pupils with
identified SEN. Figure 1 (below) identifies the research sample in relation to the placement in the All Wales Core Data (AWCD) set known as the ‘families of schools’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
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<th>Research Sample</th>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Welsh Medium 4</td>
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<td>English Medium 6</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>English Medium 20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

221 28

*Figure 1  Families of schools data (Source AWCD set)*
The first five families in the data sets are all Welsh medium schools. As there were 2 Welsh Medium secondary schools in the research sample there was not full representation across those first five families, but sufficient to represent the Welsh first language sector. However, the 28 schools within the research sample were across all except one of all other families across the range of families identified. The 28 secondary schools in the research sample can, therefore, be identified as a representative cross section of virtually all types of secondary settings in Wales.

As I had a professional involvement in the national pilots, it was important to identify and clarify the research relationships between the national pilot project being undertaken in my professional role and the research project being undertaken as part of my post graduate studies. These are represented in a diagrammatic form in Figure 2 (below).

A Project Manager was appointed for the national pilot project to undertake a project management function. The focus of this role was to ensure that progress against agreed ‘deliverables’ was monitored, achieved and reported on to Welsh Government. The project was managed by an ‘Executive Group’ consisting of the Project Manager and each lead officer in both Local Authorities. I held that role for one of the Authorities. A Management Board was also appointed which included the Executive Group, representatives from schools, voluntary agencies and a Local Authority senior Officer for finance. The Board met on a bi-monthly basis. Their function was to monitor the progress of the broader project, and regularly report to the Welsh Government. As this research developed, it became clear that progress within the Pilot D project could be supported by this developing research.
It was important for me to mark out this research as a separate work strand. To enable a clear demarcation between this research and that of the broad Pilot D project, this research was quickly identified as the ‘secondary research strand’, within the reporting arrangements in the WG project. As this research was forming part of the evidence base for progress within the broader project, it was inextricably linked to the direction of travel for the broader project. This research was supervised through the University School of Education which allowed me to benefit from an academic monitoring framework. Figure 3 identified the separate aspects of this research and how it related to the national Pilot D.

Figure 2 - Research relationships
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>This research</th>
<th>Pilot D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>An investigation of the effectiveness of the secondary Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCo) role: the perspective of professionals identified through case studies.</td>
<td>Developing the role of ALNCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>To investigate the effectiveness of the current role of SENCo in the secondary sector</td>
<td>To investigate the potential role of ALNCo across all mainstream phases of education and propose a mandatory training framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Case Study</td>
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<td>Methods</td>
<td>Semi structured questionnaire</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
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<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>Information gathering</td>
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<td>Group interview</td>
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<td>Proposals</td>
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<td>Triangulation</td>
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<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Academic supervision</td>
<td>Executive group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Management Board</td>
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</table>

**Figure 3 - How this research related to the WG Pilot D**

This research was only reported to the WG through updates I provided to the Project Board. The WG had no access to research evidence, and had no influence on the research process or outcomes. They were not funding the research. There was, however, a professional agreement that the outcomes of this research would be available to them in time to inform the statutory reform agenda scheduled for 2013.

What became equally important as the research developed was that the findings from the research into the secondary SENCo role were used to shape the development of the broader Pilot D project actions. This was achieved through the successful deployment of the Project Manager role as almost inevitably, he began to fulfil the role of ‘critical friend’ to this research.
Being outside of education, his skill set lay in project management so a reporting framework was created that gave regular opportunities, and a clear expectation, that this research would regularly update the broader pilot so that it could respond to developments. How these two concurrent pieces of work progressed was further identified in the Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) attached to this thesis.

The aim of the broader Pilot D project was to investigate the potential new role of the ALNCo, and propose any mandatory framework that would be recommended to support the role. This was where an immediate difficulty was identified. Although Welsh Government had identified the term ALN in 2006, they had introduced the concept of the role of ALNCo into the pilot projects as if there was a clear national definition or agreed role and function of such a post. This confusion was being spread nationally as a number of titles were being used across Wales for practitioners who were holding responsibility for pupils with SEN and often those with ALN too. This would have to be addressed through this research.

For both the broader pilot project and this research there became a need to research practice in the rest of the UK, particularly the statutory framework already in place in England. Inevitably, undertaking this work also supported the development of professional knowledge in relation to being a researcher undertaking this research.

As the broader Welsh Government pilot programme was across the two Local Authorities, this doctoral research project was focused on secondary school practice in the 28 secondary schools in this region. This represented more than 10 per cent of Welsh secondary schools, covering a wide range of settings including inner city, urban, Welsh medium and faith schools. It also covered those schools with large numbers, falling rolls and high ethnic minority numbers. Setting them against the families of schools data confirmed and provided evidence that these were a representative sample of Welsh secondary schools.
From the perspective of the researcher, it was ironic to find in the work of Carr and Kemmis (1986:69) a reference to a researcher, O'Connor (1973), who, over forty years ago identified that the development of educational policy was usually a matter of ‘establishing the most efficient use to be made of scarce resources.’ I identified that in the decades since O’Connor wrote this, there is now an open acknowledgement of the reality of this statement. To suggest that the development of educational policy has to be done within the context of scarce resources was no longer a criticism to levy against national politicians but was, rather, a clear expectation of everything that was to be done in the public sector.

This provided a context for this research that brought another challenge in that, for the practitioners who engaged with the researcher, there was no promise of additional resources to support the implementation of any potential changes in national policy. There had to be an understanding that the guidance on professional practices that resulted as a consequence of their participation in the research, would have to be delivered within existing resources, or within increasingly restricted budgets. The research could not promise that it would result in personal benefits for the practitioners involved.

1.4 Research within your own organisation

The schools and settings examined knew that a process to embark on statutory change had started, and was being supported by a broader Welsh Government pilot undertaken across Wales. It was important to me to complete any research with both credibility and rigour. As Head of Achievement for a Local Authority Education Service, and having undertaken the role of SENCo for over fifteen years in a variety of settings, I was known professionally to be involved in supporting the developing agenda. This made it particularly important to identify the potential challenges associated with undertaking research within one’s own organisation whilst the research process for the professional doctorate research was being developed. Thus, as the current literature was being reviewed, it was important to explore, and give careful consideration to, the role of the researcher in relation to their own
research.

A significant aspect to investigate was that of the ethical considerations of researching within your own professional field where there may be differences in power relationships. Local Authority senior officers, head teachers and practicing SENCos all had different perceptions of their relationships. There were particular ethical considerations to explore in this type of research. My position as a senior member of staff within a Local Authority Education Service, and the relationship with many of the practitioners participating in the research, was one where there was the potential to create a situation where there may be a feeling of undue pressure on the respondents. Dealing with people, particularly those in my own organisation and professional field, necessitated a clear ethical framework in which to operate. In a potential situation of a perceived power difference between me and the respondent there was a risk that respondents would seek to respond how they felt they were ‘expected’ to, rather than as they freely choose to. The importance of establishing a professional relationship between me and the participants was not underestimated. For this reason the concept of informed consent was at the heart of this research. Flick (2007:126) defined this as:

Informing them about the research and that they are part of a research project and asking them formally (a written and signed contract) or, where this is not possible, informally (orally) to join the project.

All participants were given a written explanation of the research (Appendix A) and asked for their consent to participate. They were then given a consent form to sign (Appendix B) that explained and confirmed their right to withdraw their consent at any point in the process. Although the questionnaires they completed were signed by them and thus easily identifiable, it was fully explained that they were confidential documents that, although potentially quoted, would remain secure and anonymous.

This was also true of any documentation used pertaining to any case study
school. This was of particular importance to clarify as, due to my professional role, I could access confidential Local Authority documentation that would not be available to researchers outside of the organisation. The clear agreement made was that any documentation required for this research was always requested of the participating school. It was confirmed at the start of the research that all written documentation, in whatever form, could be quoted, but anonymity would be protected and always guaranteed.

As any methods chosen would involve direct, or indirect, contact with associate professionals, this professional contract respected and clarified their right to confidentiality. It was also fully explained to participants that children or young people were not directly involved in the research project. Some colleagues, namely the Project Manager and professional lead in the other Local Authority, waived their right to be anonymous in the research write up as their contributions were acknowledged from the outset.

The review of literature identified that a range of other challenges associated with working within your own organisation had been identified by many other researchers. For example, in their writing about action research as a methodology, Coghlan and Brannick (2005:2) identified research undertaken by someone within their own organisation as ‘insider action research’. They explained and suggested that this was different to most research that usually used a model of someone external entering an organisation in a temporary, facilitative role, who then worked with members of the organisation for the duration of the project and then left. For this research, I was not temporarily ‘stepping into’ the field, this was work unfolding, in real time, that would impact on outcomes in the professional field in which I was rooted. It was important to consider the implications of what being an ‘insider researcher’ might mean in this context.

It became clear that there were, however, technical advantages to being an ‘insider’ researcher in that there was potentially a greater familiarity with all the systems, processes, practices and language used in a field already known to me. On a practical level there was also more ready access to what
was needed in the research area. However, the clear danger to this type of research was the potential difficulty of achieving and maintaining appropriate professional distance from the research. Deciding to further explore the broader issue of the relationship of any researcher to the research they undertake was identified as the next step to ensure I could learn from evidence in the field.

Another positive dimension to research within an organisation is that it may become more collaborative – members being studied are active participants in a process outside of the research – often contributing to the cyclical process that typifies some forms of research. However, this could also be seen as true in relation to any research undertaken when the researcher operates within the same field as that being studied. Working within a known area of work there was the potential advantage for me of already having professional relationships with research participants, however, this had to be balanced by ensuring that it did not impact on the responses colleagues felt able to provide in the context of research contributions.

I realised very early in the research that there would need to be checks and balances in the research process to ensure that the benefits of knowing the participants as a fellow practitioner, did not outweigh the potential difficulties that the professional relationships might bring. What it needed were research methods and mechanisms to provide opportunities to check the research process to ensure that respondents were protected within a rigorous research ethics framework.

One approach that a number of researchers such as Finlay (2002) and Etherington (2007) had explored was the concept of reflexivity. The simplistic dictionary definition suggested it ‘is a circular relationship between cause and effect’. Researchers repeatedly attempt to define what it is. Watson (1987:8), an anthropologist suggested:

*Reflexivity is not merely something one ‘does’, such as engaging in self reflection but is, rather, an essential and inevitable property of all discourse.*
Reflexivity could be used to explore, and deal with, the relationship between the researcher and the object of the research. Finlay (2002:209) suggested that although not always referred to explicitly as reflexivity, the practice of examining how research and all the subjective elements within it impact on that research has always been an important part of the evolution of qualitative research.

Research by Etherington (2007:614) identified:

\[\text{Power issues permeate every aspect of research relationships: from considerations of who owns the data and outcomes of the research; how we interpret and represent others; if and how we make transparent the decision-making processes between researcher and participant; and the potential fluidity of power between the parties involved.}\]

Her research explored the advantages of using reflexivity in research she undertook with participants who were also her students. She summarised that, for research to be ethical using reflexive relationships, the researcher should always remain aware of the potential power imbalance between the researcher and the participant and negotiate research decisions transparently with participants.

In developing the questionnaire phase of the research, the explanation of the method will identify how participants helped shape the questions in this research to ensure their response could be accurately recorded.

Etherington (2007:601) also concluded that no researcher could possibly identify how research may develop, so consent at the start of a process may not be sufficient to address all ethical concerns. This may be particularly important in research relationships where there are differences in power relationships. She proposed that researchers needed to provide ongoing information as it became available and be honest in identifying in their research writings when dilemmas occurred, and outlined the way in which they were resolved.
An illustration from this research is as follows. In the first interview undertaken in case study school X, I spoke to both the SENCo and the head teacher and got their consent. The participants then asked to be interviewed together. Although it was clear that the two professionals enjoyed a positive relationship, there were a number of instances where the SENCo appeared to hesitate before answering, appearing concerned that the head was ‘expecting’ a particular answer. The following extract from Appendix C illustrated this:

Researcher (to SENCo): What skills or competencies do you think you need to possess?

SENCo (looking to Head, nervous, hesitating): Well, what skills do I use most? (wanting clarification)

Researcher: Are there any skills you really feel you need?

SENCo: Getting rid of conflict (more confident) calm people down.... Parents.....(tapping fingers on the table) negotiating...

Head (supportive, adding): ...has to be an outstanding teacher....with leadership potential and vision

Although the SENCo continued and gave his own responses, the context in which he was interviewed did have the potential to restrict full responses. To ensure this did not happen again, I ensured that interviews were always undertaken with individual professionals and that sufficient time was given to participants to reflect and confirm that they were content with their responses.

Within a research framework, particularly when research is undertaken within one’s own organisation, the researcher must build in opportunities to reflect on the impact the researcher is having on the research, and the impact this may have on the interpretation of the unfolding results. This is identified by many researchers as the act of ‘systematic reflexivity’ - the constant analysis of one’s own theoretical and methodological presuppositions. Flick (2007:xi) confirmed that:
Researchers themselves are an important part of the research process, either in terms of their own personal presence as researchers, or in terms of their experience in the field and with the reflexivity they bring to the role – as are members of the field under study.

Using the example of case study as a research methodology, Simons (2009:4) articulated the implications for the researcher, particularly in their own organisation:

A rigorous exploration of how your values and actions shape data gathering and interpretation and how people and events in the field impact on you – you learn about yourself, in other words, as well as about the case ...it is through analysis and interpretation of how people think, feel and act that many of the insights and understanding of the case are gained.

In this, the researcher would be the ‘main instrument’ in gathering, interpreting and reporting. It was going to be crucial to ensure that there was regular reflection on the impact I was having on the research results to ensure that any bias was challenged and addressed.

In work undertaken by Steier (1991) he suggested that researchers should adopt a starting point that takes seriously that knowledge is a social and cultural construction. He proposed that researchers should accept that they ‘co-produce’ rather than just ‘discover’ the world of their research. Steier prompted researchers to acknowledge that their own presumptions and activities as researchers must become part of their investigation.

This research was based in a field where a number of variables may impact on effectiveness of practitioners. What could not be presumed was the effect one identified variable had on current practice. An inductive approach would start by presuming known factors have a known impact on effectiveness. In this field, this was not the case as, although there were factors that practitioners were beginning to claim had an impact on their effectiveness, such as the time allocated to them to undertake their role, there was no
evidence that any one factor had a known or measured or measurable impact on effectiveness. This research process needed to provide a framework to identify the relative importance of the factors practitioners identified as having an impact on their effectiveness.

For a new researcher, the intention for the research - to add to the body of new professional knowledge or practice that was needed to support statutory change - was going to provide a challenge and a focus for a potentially interesting body of research. It was reassuring for me to take a reminder from Hart (1998:23) who confirmed that originality in research was not a 'mysterious quality'. He suggested that all researchers were capable of it if they:

Know how to think about, manage and play with ideas.

This suggested that it was a skill that a researcher could, and should, aim to develop in their work. The collating of the PDP provided an opportunity to create an evidence base to not merely map the progression of the research, but to build a profile of the personal and professional development of the researcher. To ensure that this was the case, it became important to acknowledge that the research was not going to have an identified 'launch point.' Even when undertaking an extensive review of literature it was important to note that, as the work of Brown and Dowling (1998) confirmed no book could make you a good researcher, as it is only through making the transition and involving yourself in the practices of research, that research skills could be developed. The confidence to engage in the more practical aspects of the role of researcher began to develop.

The lessons learned from examining the area of researching within your own organisation supported the development of this research. There would clearly be a relationship between the participants in the research and myself. In acknowledging reflexivity I needed to accept that I would potentially become part of the research in the process of researching, as in the social sciences, in particular, the researcher cannot be a passive observer. The research
itself was going to be impacted on by the person of the researcher, as well as the research process they employed.

The ethical considerations associated with this type of ‘insider’ research had to be constantly revisited to ensure the research was not undermined. With this knowledge, I needed to build into the research actions that attempted to limit or mitigate against any inappropriate or research bias that might invalidate the research process. This will be further explored in Chapter 3, the chapter that outlines the research approach.

The challenge almost became one of a philosophical nature, how much ‘new knowledge’ is actually the presentation of the perspective one person has compared to another? What was needed was a realisation that, as a human activity, all research was subject to the impact that the person undertaking it had on how it developed. The object of the ‘good’ researcher’s intent was summed up by Finlay (2002:211) who concluded:

*Most qualitative researchers will attempt to be aware of their role in the (co)-construction of knowledge. They will try to make explicit how inter-subjective elements impact on data collection and analysis in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency and accountability of their research.*
Chapter 2  Literature Review

This research was concerned with supporting national change in the development of professional practice, therefore this review examined the body of literature relating to the broader management of change agenda, as well as the management of educational change, in particular. As the planned changes were in the field of education in Wales, there was also an opportunity to look at changes taking place in the same field in England and other parts of the United Kingdom and to track the changes already experienced in the field of SEN in Wales. The purpose of the literature review was to continue to support the achievement of the research aim so the research questions provided the framework for the review of literature in that they supported the achievement of the first identified research objective.

| 1) To critically review current legislation, policy, terminology and definitions in relation to the role, taking account of any empirical research already undertaken. | • What is the current statutory framework and is it clear?  
• What (if any) research has already taken place into the role of the secondary SENCo?  
• What impact does politics have on the development and implementation of ‘sound’ educational policy? |

Although there are challenges in any school setting, due to their size and organisational complexity the focus for this research was narrowed to the secondary phase. The first research objective explored the expectations on the role of secondary SENCo as identified in the current statute. The first step for me was to first ensure a sound knowledge of the national professional context within which the role sat.


2.1 The national professional context

The role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) was formally established when changes in the law were implemented in 1994. The Code of Practice in England was established to enable educational settings to implement the statutory framework. The Code was separately revised for Wales in 2002. The Welsh legislative framework for supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) was, and continues to be, supported by guidance contained in the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales (2002)*. The Code, commonly called *The Revised Code or the Code of Practice*, outlined how the needs of pupils should be identified, assessed and addressed. It also identified the processes and protocols that should be established to ensure these pupils accessed their educational entitlements. The Code also outlined the responsibilities of the key role of the SENCo if the requirements of the Code were to be met.

Both England and Wales had separate legislation in this area through their separate Codes of Practice for SEN. Since devolution, the Welsh Government (WG) had increasingly taken a different route from the Department for Skills and Education (DfSE) in England. The principle underpinning the Code in Wales was the increased emphasis on inclusion into mainstream schools and settings. It outlined the roles and responsibilities of the SENCo within different phases in the education system. The Code identified the role of Secondary SENCo in particular:

*The SEN coordinator (SENCo), in collaboration with the head teacher and governing body, plays a key role in helping to determine the strategic development of the SEN Policy and provision in school to raise the achievement of pupils with SEN. The SENCo takes day to day responsibility for the operation of the SEN Policy and the co-ordination of provision made for individual pupils with SEN, working closely with staff, parents, Careers Wales and other agencies. The SENCo also provides related professional guidance to colleagues with the aim of securing high quality teaching for pupils with SEN.*

(p.64: paragraph 6:32)
Although the extract from the Code (cited above) identified the expectation that the post was ‘to raise the achievement of pupils with SEN’ when the Code further elaborated on the key roles for the SENCo, it described more processes and systems that the role should manage including ensuring that resources were used to maximum effect, collaborating with a broad range of colleagues and agencies, monitoring quality and leading teams of staff. The Code identified that the key responsibilities *may include*:

- Overseeing the operation of the school’s SEN policy
- Liaising with and advising fellow teachers
- Managing the SEN team of teachers and learning support assistants
- Coordinating provision for pupils with special educational needs
- Overseeing the records of all pupils with special educational needs
- Liaising with parents of pupils with special educational needs
- Contributing to the in-service training of staff
- Liaising with external agencies…

(p.64: paragraph 6:35)

The Code was less prescriptive about the time and support that should be given to the role;

*Governing bodies, and head teachers will need to give careful thought to the SENCo’s timetable in the light of the Code and in the context of the resources available to the school….. In many schools the governing body has been able to allocate some administrative staff time to help the SENCo, thus releasing the SENCo to use their expertise more effectively.*

(p.65 :paragraph 6:36)

What was clear on reading the Code was an acknowledgement that children and young people with a legally identified SEN needed this key role in school to ensure their achievements were raised but the illustrations of how the role would operate continued to focus on tasks and duties. The collaborative nature of the role was also stated in relation to it being the joint responsibility of a number of partners, including the head teacher and Governing Body of the school.

There were similar developments in other parts of the United Kingdom as
work was also being done to understand the role of the SENCo. In Northern Ireland the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Children with SEN had been published in 1998. This formally introduced the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in Northern Ireland. This was a substantial change from the ‘remedial teacher’ approach that had previously operated, as this identified that the SENCO would now be responsible for co-ordinating the school’s SEN provision.

Over a decade later this too was being evaluated as to how effective the role was being undertaken. In an extensive document written by the Department for Education (Northern Ireland 2011:63), *The Role of the SENCO*, identified all aspects of the role and the expectations national government had for those undertaking the duties. It summarised that it aimed to:

> contribute to the continual professional development for SENCOs and to aid in the development of a SENCO’s knowledge, understanding and skills at both operational and strategic levels.

The paper identified that the SENCo role needed support to develop the capacity to ensure inclusive practices, policies and cultures within each school setting. It acknowledged that SENCos needed to be adequately prepared for the challenges ahead identifying them as ‘agents of change’. It advocated that the post holder needed to be a reflective practitioner with the ability to be self evaluative. Similar reviews were taking place in other parts of the UK.

In 2006 the Welsh Government (WG) issued a consultation document, *Inclusion and Pupil Support (2006)*. This document laid out the context for further developments in this field by re-iterating the legal definition of an SEN, whilst introducing a broader term, Additional Learning Needs (ALN):

> The Welsh Assembly Government has adopted a wider term than ‘Special Educational Needs’ for those learners who require additional support. This is in order to recognise the diverse and complex needs of learners and to reflect a more holistic approach to meeting individual pupils’ needs. The Welsh
Assembly Government, through this guidance wishes to instil the concept of ‘Additional Learning Needs’. This encompasses all children and young people with learning needs which are greater than those of the majority of their peers and not just those identified as having SEN as defined within the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002) (p.2: paragraph 1:5)

It then identified a number of additional groups of learners, including those with SEN, who might be vulnerable to underachievement in their education settings. The groups included those children and young people who were in the care of the Local Authority (‘Looked after’), those for whom English was an additional language and those who had medical needs.

To enable the construction of any new statutory framework that would be needed to support this developing agenda, the Welsh Government had drafted Legislative Competency Orders (LCOs), with the intention that the Law would be changed in 2013, and the requirements of the roles that supported these changes were developed.

There was at that time (and continues to be) no definition, or agreed function, of the role of ALNCo to support this broader group of learners at either a local, or national, level. Although there had been extensive research in England regarding the role of SENCo in the mainstream school, there had been little research in Wales into the factors that impact on the effectiveness of those current arrangements. A report undertaken by Estyn, Evaluating Outcomes for Children and Young People with Additional Learning Needs (2007:7) identified some significant findings. The first finding was that:

The evaluation of outcomes for learners with SEN is a highly complex process that, to be effective, needs to take account of information of many types and from many sources. Much remains to be done to create a unified system to support the evaluation of outcomes for learners with SEN across Wales.

Consequently, measuring the impact of the role of SENCo was equally complex. Knowing how to measure the impact of the role of SENCo was,
therefore, still unclear if how to measure the impact on the outcome of these learners was still not nationally agreed. The Estyn Report (2007:9) confirmed that:

*SENCos and specialist staff in authorities’ SEN support services use information well to plan and evaluate provision for individual pupils. However, this information is not often collated to evaluate the impact on learning outcomes for groups of pupils with SEN or across the school.*

The report made seven recommendations for schools with regard to arrangements for learners with SEN. These included improving the accuracy of information and the quality of data transfer for learners with SEN, using data about individuals to develop the analysis of the impact of provision, consulting more widely with parents and carers when analysing effectiveness and measuring the impact of SEN work by making the analysis of learner outcomes the starting point.

Their conclusions supported and strengthened the argument for this research that proposed that until the strengths, challenges and achievements of the current professional practice was properly researched, proposals on how to improve the support, training and development of this key practitioner in the mainstream setting could not be developed. There was no secure evidence base upon which to promote change at a national level until there was a clearer idea regarding the current practice and the impact it was having.

### 2.2 The role of the SENCo

Since the introduction of the Code of Practice in Wales relatively little research had been undertaken in relation to the impact of the role of the secondary school SENCo particularly in how the role supported teaching and learning and outcomes for children with SEN. However in other parts of the UK, particularly England, there was a body of research to draw extensively upon.
Hallett and Hallett (2010:51) in their paper, *Leading Learning, The Role of the SENCo*, summarised the issue:

The creation of the SENCo role was undoubtedly viewed by many as an imaginative and progressive move. To nominate an agent who would coordinate provision for learners with all forms of SEN and/or disability was clearly envisaged as a means by which schools, parents and successive governments could ensure that all children would be given equal opportunities for educational success.

Their research identified that the reality across reviews of practice undertaken was that the role varied greatly across settings. Citing the work of other researchers from those such as Kearns (2005) who undertook a small scale study of 18 SENCos to those such as MacKenzie (2007) who looked at the development of the role more broadly, they looked at how the role was being interpreted. Hallett and Hallett (2010:56) concluded by advocating that what was needed was a more ‘distributive model of SEN coordination’ so that educational settings become:

Focused on the process and activity of learning rather than as a series of hierarchical structures focused upon the product of learning and the attendant processes pf SEN coordination.

MacKenzie (2007:216) also concurred:

much of the previous research on SENCos has focused on the impact of legislative and policy changes on the nature of the role, with a particular concentration on workload issues. Very little work had been carried out on the effectiveness of the SENCo role, despite the role’s prominence in special educational needs policy documents and the introduction of the national standards for SENCos (TTA, 1998).

This supported the research hypothesis that, due to the nature of the difficulties with how the Code of Practice was being interpreted, there was a lack of clarity as to what the intention for the role actually was.

Another conclusion MacKenzie (2007:216) made that was relevant to this research was when she explored the concept of ‘effectiveness’ explaining
that it can be very difficult to measure in relation to the role of SENCo, and can be ‘operationalised’ in many different ways. She identified the indicators that might be used to illustrate ‘effectiveness’ as being measures such as pupil achievement; satisfactory administrative procedures and/or specialist knowledge in particular disabilities. Another consideration she identified was:

> that a lot of work that SENCos do may not be visible and does not translate easily into measurable outcomes as defined by current education policy, making any definition or measurement of ‘effectiveness’ difficult.

Of particular relevance to this research was her conclusion that more research into the effectiveness of SENCos was required. SENCos currently carry out the role in a variety of settings with a variety of interpretations but that, given the current increased focus upon measurable pupil outcomes, SENCos may feel undervalued and unappreciated because the difference they make may not always be visible, or be something that was easily measured. This was certainly an area that this research wanted to explore further.

In 1995, Cole undertook a study in England funded by Sheffield University. She used questionnaires and interviews and had 59 responses from a base of every serving SENCo in two large unitary authorities in the north of England, Over 80 per cent of the respondents were primary school practitioners. There was a heavy bias towards female respondents, (which may well reflect the national picture) 74 per cent were over the age of 40, with 71 per cent having over ten years teaching experience. The evidence provided identified that 29 per cent were in senior management positions, but did not identify whether this was at primary or secondary school level. With these conclusions the significance of how important practitioners in Wales felt it is to be on the senior management team was identified as something for this research to explore with secondary school SENCos.

Cole’s research aim was primarily to consider the view of the SENCos in relation to the revised Code of Practice that had been issued in England in
2001, and this was reflected in the nature of the questions contained within the questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on SENCo perceptions including questions on: their levels of enjoyment in the role, their perception on the levels of management support, their role and responsibilities and their response to the current statutory framework. As the research process had a specific focus on the views of practising SENCos, the data gathered reflected these views.

Although Cole’s research had a narrower focus than this research, it did provide useful evidence from the English perspective on the issues serving SENCos in England identified as important. It did not give another researcher the ability to relate the findings directly to the Welsh secondary school context, but did enable the researcher to compare issues raised by practitioners in both contexts. Analysis of Cole’s research findings helped shape some of the questions in both the phase 1 questionnaire and the case study settings for the research that followed. Comparisons between those research findings will be explored later.

Research by Cowne (2005:61) which began as an investigation into the organisational contexts in which SENCos work, developed over a three year period into an evaluation of the outreach SENCo accredited training course by the London Institute of Education. Using questionnaires, it appeared to confirm what SENCos were saying in Wales:

*A big growth area was SEN policy development and monitoring systems. More time and effort was being spent in managing a range of non-teaching staff and in training TAs. In the secondary sector, SENCO roles were widening ever further due to working with a range of agencies, youth services, the Connexions service and colleges of further education.*

These research findings regarding the management of teams of Teaching Assistants appeared to concur with the findings of the 2006 Select Committee in England reported in the HMSO (2006) paper, which suggested that SENCos were often unsure as to whether they were a practitioner of SEN or a manager of people and their work. The Committee noted that the
Department for Skills and Education (DfSE) had not always ensured that SENCos had been given the appropriate training or authority to be able to effectively undertake these responsibilities. This was clearly a theme that would need to be developed in the case studies. More information was needed to get a clear understanding as to whether SENCos did not strategically lead because it was not necessary, or appropriate, for the role to do so, or whether it was because there was confusion in the interpretation of the Code of Practice, as to whether it was a responsibility of the SENCo role.

Cowne’s (2005:67) research concluded that the diversity of the role of SENCo was widening, requiring SENCOs to take on new challenges. She proposed that for this to be done well there were three elements that needed to come together to ensure the effective coordination of SEN:

- good management support and strategic planning which includes sufficient resources of time, space and administrative backup to fulfil the role
- staff with positive attitudes who have access to advice or further training on teaching strategies to meet the range of needs of pupils in their classes
- SENCOs who are confident in their knowledge and skills and who know where to find further support from outside agents or further training through LEAs or accredited courses.

What the literature review of the research of others was suggesting was that, despite the existence of guidance and statute from national governments, there was still confusion in the interpretation of the key role of SENCo in many settings across England. There was also a developing picture that too much was being left to chance in the individual interpretation of the responsibilities that were being made in individual schools. This appeared to also be true in Wales.

The research of Cole concluded that, despite revisions to the Code of Practice for SEN, many SENCos were still overwhelmed by the operational nature of the role. They had little time, support or funding to consider the more strategic aspects of the inclusion agenda. Cole’s research (2005:287) concluded that where the SENCo was supported by senior management
within their school, the role could be a powerful one in relation to inclusion, but explained:

*The role of SENCo needs to be redefined, re-conceptualised and renumerated as a senior management post within mainstream schools... If this was reinforced by national policy, every mainstream school could have at least one powerful advocate for this group of learners.*

I was interested in exploring this conclusion in the Welsh research I was undertaking to determine whether similar conclusions could be drawn in relation to the Welsh context.

Cole’s work was based on clear definitions of her key terminology. ‘Inclusion’ being identified as a ‘process’ – a definition that the Welsh Assembly Government has already explored in *Inclusion and Pupil Support (2007:1)*;

-Inclusive education is an ongoing process concerned with ensuring equality of educational opportunity by accounting for and addressing the diversity present in schools. It requires the commitment of schools and LEAs to develop policies and practices that ensure equality of educational opportunity and access; safeguard vulnerable pupils; and focus on raising the achievement of all learners and increasing their participation in their schools and communities.*

Cole’s (2005:288) research base was identified as policy, research and the voices of SENCos themselves. To summarise her overall conclusions, she presented that the role of SENCo was perceived by school managers, and SENCos themselves, as largely operational, often powerless and of lowly status. She argued for the ‘re-conceptualisation’ and ‘re-professionalisation’ of the role, so that the teachers involved became:

*Powerful and reflective practitioners who could be in a position to take on the mantle of inclusion within mainstream schools.*

The research undertaken by Cole was helpful to the extent that it provided
some relevant feedback from the professional practitioners in the field in England. However, as the research was solely on the feedback of SENCos themselves, it did not provide data to reference against other factors that might impact on effectiveness such as teaching commitments, place within their school management structure and status within their organisational structure. Clearly, this did not invalidate her research, but it did limit the potential it might have to counter a criticism that it would be too one dimensional to be the basis upon which to shape national reform.

The impact for this research was that it did provide sufficient evidence to support the need to research the situation in Wales prior to any Welsh changes taking place. Although there was a current legislative framework that was supported by the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002), that was similar to the Code of Practice in other parts of the UK, it provided no further evidence to contribute to how national government could potentially address the status, or conditions, of the role of SENCo in Wales.

Research undertaken by Middlesex University by Rosen-Webb (2011) involved interviewing nine secondary SENCos to explore how they developed their role. Entitled, *Nobody tells you how to be a SENCo!* it used data from semi-structured interviews and diamond nine activities, (where participants rank the importance of factors), then coded and analysed the responses using a grounded theory procedure. Tracking the changes in practice since the Code of Practice was introduced in England, she cited the work of Wedell (2006) in concluding:

*Practising SENCos indicated that it was not vital to be a member of a SLT, and that either professional or hierarchical status with appropriate financial reward (but not necessarily both) was appropriate in order for the SENCo effectively and efficiently to carry out the roles and responsibilities of the position.*


These findings did not concur with the conclusions made by Cole as they were suggesting that a place on the management team of a school was not a
prerequisite to ensuring effective practice. This clarified that professional status was not necessarily achieved simply by the position you had in a school structure.

With regard to the issue of capacity to undertake the expectations of the role further findings of Rosen-Webb’s own research (2011:163) were:

*Data from first interviews indicated that there were no discrete training routes for participants to follow as they progressed towards becoming a SENCo, and data from the second interviews re-inforced the notion that SENCo career development and training was seen as a hotchpotch.*

Her research findings concluded that there was a need for training in both specialist teaching skills and management skills. This was the most effective way to ensure that there was an enhancement of the SENCo’s ability to develop and support good practice in schools, whilst best deploying specialist teachers and monitoring pupil progress. Her research, although small scale perhaps, appeared to confirm the need for the present study to address the training needs to support the effective implementation of the secondary SENCo role.

Research undertaken by Oldham and Radford (2011:133) started with a review of the legislation and literature concerning SENCo leadership. It then used ‘in depth’ interviews with SENCos in two local authorities to gather data. They concluded that SENCos considered leadership skills to be highly relevant for their role, not just because they led staff but because they needed to influence more senior staff. They identified that there were tensions in the divergent forces in operation between the roles of practitioner and leader and proposed two possible solutions to the tensions:

*Either the leadership role of SENCos is formalised by legislation, or it is reduced, thereby returning SENCos to managers of specialised support, whilst special educational needs is taken up by senior leaders at a universal level.*

They concluded that either solution would require the Government to
reconsider the leadership role of both SENCos and head teachers in the context of achievement and school leadership. This was relevant to the present study as their research conclusions appeared to support the identification of a need for greater clarity as to the function of the role of SENCo and what the expectations were for the roles of both SENCo and head teacher in relation to those learners who need greater support than their peers.

That expectation in the Code of Practice in Wales, that the SENCo role is a key role in ‘raising the achievement’ or improving learner outcomes needed to be investigated to identify whether the research in England could be confirmed in Wales. The danger identified from the English research was that this key role appeared to be almost ‘eclipsed’ by the ‘process and system’ driven expectation on the role that many English schools appeared to have developed.

It was appropriate to then look at evidence to address another of the research questions: What impact does politics have on the development and implementation of ‘sound’ educational policy?

2.3.1 The Context – the Educational landscape for SEN

The introduction of the SEN Code of Practice in Wales, and its expectations for the role of SENCo, came at a time when the field of SEN was experiencing considerable change. In the decades since World War Two, national policy had often been linked to political ideology, which had resulted in some dramatic changes in this area of educational practice. I had considerable personal experience of the impact of such changes, having worked in the field since the mid 1980s. Policy in Wales, until devolution in 1998, was the same as policy in England.

In his on-line history of education in England between 597 and 2010, Gillard (2011) identified that the plans for post-war secondary education in Britain
aimed to remove the inequalities which remained in the system. Local Education Authorities were required to submit proposals to the new Department of Education for reorganising secondary schooling in their areas. Most LEAs aimed to establish the three main 'streams' or categories of school - grammar, secondary modern and technical - which had been recommended in a Report by Sir William Spens in 1938. Children would be allocated on the basis of an examination at the age of 11, known as the '11 plus'. This was intended to provide equal opportunities for children of all backgrounds. However, some children were still identified as ‘ineducable’ with no entitlement under legislation to be educated. These children were often institutionalised from birth in various care settings. By the 1960s, these children were identified as ‘educationally sub-normal’. Again, emphasis was placed on their care, rather than any entitlement to educational provision.

In 1974 the Warnock Committee was established, leading to the publication of the Warnock Report in 1978. This was named after Mary Warnock, the chair of the inquiry whose remit was to look at the needs of children with SEN. The conclusions of the Committee were that 20 per cent of children in the school population could have SEN but two per cent might need support over and above what a mainstream school could provide for. The Warnock Report recommended that there should be specialist provision for the 2 per cent of children with SEN to ensure that they received appropriate provision.

This saw the development of the special school system in Britain for children categorised as being outside of the mainstream education system. Norwich (2010:37), writing in Hallett and Hallett, explained that the Education Act (1981) attempted to address the situation by introducing the first explicit commitment to what would now be called ‘inclusive’ education. The Act introduced the requirement that LEAs identify and assess pupils who may require the LEA to decide on suitable provision for them within the ordinary school system. As Norwich (2010:37) identified:

*This implied that ordinary schools had to consider how to develop and support whole school policies for SEN*
As Norwich (2010) explained, eight years later when the Conservative Government introduced the Education Reform Act (1988) this saw the introduction of the National Curriculum and national standardised testing. The rationale behind this move was the belief that standards would be raised by increasing competition between schools. This led to particular difficulties for those with an interest in SEN. Norwich (2010:38) summarised:

"On the one hand the principle of a common curriculum for all including pupils with SEN was welcomed, but on the other, the central direction of the curriculum design for national assessment purposes, was seen as having none of the flexibilities required for those with SEN/disabilities."

I would argue that this was where the tension between providing inclusive education and the push for visibly raised standards first began to create the difficulty for those supporting these learners. Over the course of this research there has been an increased national emphasis in Wales on reporting standards achieved in secondary sector.

With the Education Reform Act came the development of the concept of integration for children with SEN into mainstream settings. ‘Integration’ began to be used in relation to SEN to convey the idea that pupils with disabilities needed to be ‘desegregated’ from separate programmes, schools or institutions. Academics and educationalists began to write about different types of integration such as locational, social or functional. This led to the growth of a number of units attached to mainstream schools that enabled pupils to access the same entitlements as their peers, whilst receiving the extra support they needed. What needed further exploration was an understanding of such practices as researchers such as Kolb (1986) identified that integration was not effective when it was just ‘locational integration’ as being in the same geographic location might provide some opportunities for pupils to integrate socially, but did not necessarily lead to fully functional and educational integration for all learners.

This led to the development into the 1990s of the concept of ‘inclusion’. In 1994 92 Governments and 25 international organisations met in Salamanca
in Spain, under the remit of the United Nations to further the purposes of inclusive education. They published their expectations and commitments in what is now referred to as the ‘Salamanca Statement’. It moved the agenda from integration towards inclusion by proposing:

We call upon all governments and urge them to:
• give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties,
• adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.

In educational terms ‘Inclusion’ began to be developed as a concept far greater than integration. This was participation in a fuller way. It developed with the equalities agenda as an entitlement, rather than just an expectation. It was within this context, and during this time, that the Code of Practice for SEN, was identifying the role of the SENCo and implementing it into mainstream schools. What I would argue was that as there was no clarity at a national level as to whether the emphasis should, or could, be on both care and entitlement, the system was insufficiently mature to enable the role to be undertaken successfully, however detailed the expectations were in the Code of Practice.

In her work, Special Educational Needs, A New Look, Dame Mary Warnock (2010:32) looked at this concept and concluded:

The concept of inclusion springs from hearts in the right place. Its meaning, however, is far from clear, and in practice it often means that children are physically included but emotionally excluded….Inclusion should mean being involved in a common enterprise of learning, rather than being necessarily under the same roof.

I would argue that this identifies what is at the heart of this research – that the mainstream role of SENCo had, as a consequence of the ideological changes, remained unclear and underdeveloped at a national level. This was supported by research by the National Association of School Teachers and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) that was commissioned in 2006 (but
remained ongoing) on teachers’ experience of SEN and inclusion. It was based on 1500 questionnaire responses across all sectors of education and case study data from 100 teachers in four Local Authorities. A research report was published in 2011 and concluded that there were competing agendas in schools between SEN, inclusion, and the raising of standards. Within any school or Local Authority the risk was that one of these agendas would potentially be prioritized over another. Their report identified three potential causes of this. Firstly, senior managers might be very concerned with performance tables and externally assessed levels of attainment of groups of pupils. This was understandable given external pressures in identifying ‘successful’ schools. Secondly, the SENCo may be more focused on delivering policies for SEN that included pupils and recognised the broader achievements of pupils with SEN from their starting point. Thirdly, the class teacher may be focused on the day-to-day provision of quality teaching for the whole class, and although maintaining a responsibility for the learning needs of individual pupils who experienced SEN, may not be able to meet their needs within that context.

This report sought to inform the launch in England of the SEN Government Green Paper *SEN and Disabilities* (2012) that unveiled proposals which intended the biggest programme of reform in the education and health support for children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities for 30 years. It proposed to replace the complicated arrangements of categories of need identified in the English Code of Practice regarding School Action and School Action+, overhaul teacher training and professional development in schools and replace the statementing process with a single multi disciplinary assessment for learners with SEN.

The NASUWT research suggested that teachers may experience the tensions between these three agendas as a choice to be made rather than a balance to be struck. They proposed that many of the issues raised in the English Green paper were not new. Early identification of need, funding, accountability and outcomes were important issues but the report’s authors Ellis, Tod and Graham-Matheson (2011:26) concluded:
This research suggests that reflection should precede blanket policies for change such that existing good practice built up over time is recognised and preserved. There is also a need to take a realistic look at policy directives that offer simple solutions.

They confirmed that while an emphasis on training and professional development was essential it was important that the plethora of existing resources were harnessed, not replaced. They cautioned that even if there was an identified need to introduce a new approach, it should be based on identifying and recognising the variety of inputs and range of experiences that reflected a teacher’s role in working effectively with pupils in the group setting of the classroom.

Based upon the evidence available from research in England it would seem important for Wales to take account of what has been learned in other parts of Britain in relation to managing policy change and implementing changes in educational practices.

To further support the research aim, this literature review will now focus on the research question which related to the role of the head teacher and the influence they may have on the development of vision, culture and whole school SEN practice in an institution within the context of a changing educational landscape.

### 2.3.2 Leading educational change

The educational landscape in Wales had been the subject of numerous changes for many years. The ‘National Curriculum’ implemented in the late 1980s was replaced in Wales by Curriculum 2008, a curriculum that rewrote subject orders in the light of a new skills framework. This, coupled with major changes to exam board syllabuses, and the identification more recently by the Welsh Education Minister in his 2011 landmark educational speech ‘Raising School Standards’ of three clear national priorities - literacy, numeracy and combating the impact of poverty on educational attainment -
had led to the need for many changes in schools. Fullan (2003:3) articulated the feelings of many when he suggested that educational change never appeared as the cumulative development of a comprehensive strategy, but was, rather, ‘one damned thing after another!’

To counteract this perception, Fullan (2010) offered a useful model for thinking about educational change when he suggested that it was better to think about the processes of change differently. His proposal asked educationalists to think about change not as something ‘done’ to them by national policies or politics, but to think of change as fundamentally a positive force that enabled reform, albeit often complex. In his work, ‘Motion Leadership’, Fullan (2010: chapter 1), tried to capture the core facts about change, what he called the ‘skinny facts’. These, he identified as change problems, change itself, connecting peers with purpose, transparency rules, love, trust and resistance, and leadership for all. He advocated that at the heart of change was the desire to make it less complex and more powerful in its impact, this being achieved primarily through taking the fear out of change. Fullan (2010:16) summarised reducing the difficulties regarding the change process to the idea of ‘simplicity’ explained as:

Finding the smallest number of high leverage, easy to understand actions that unleash stunningly powerful consequences.

His work drew on extensively documented educational research, primarily in Canadian schools, that suggested that at the heart of successful change was the building of positive relationships. His work cited educational change across the world claiming clear evidence that building relationships was as important as building projects. He also identified what he calls ‘the myth of change’ (p.22) which was the assumptions that there will always be immediate gains. What he did conclude was that change leaders need to have ‘persistence with flexibility’ (p.23) that never strays too far from the core purpose. What was more significant to support this research was the focus on the role of educational leader or manager, particularly in times of change.
After almost 20 years of conservative government, the late 1990s saw considerable change in the educational landscape. Much was written on the importance of school improvement. Writers such as Wallace, Engel and Mooney (1997) focused on Vision Based Leadership as the guide for school leadership. The work of MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed (1997:26) concluded that their research confirmed that an ‘intelligent school’ was one where:

A shared vision and agreed aims have been identified as being characteristic of an effective school.

They cited unity of purpose, consistency of practice and collegiality and collaboration as the hallmark of such schools. Fullan (2010: 25) did not advocate ‘loading up’ on vision, as he argued that:

Most of us change our behaviours somewhat before we get insights into new beliefs.

He also contended that communication during implementation was far more important than communication before a change process, for it was only though the process of implementation that lessons are learned, and problems get acknowledged, and, therefore, have a greater chance of getting solved.

His concept of ‘connecting peers with purpose’ was his response to the failure of both ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ change. He advocated that getting peers to do this means that they tighten things up. The role of leader then became an enabler and facilitator, in order to cause peers to interact in a focused manner. Fullan (2010:47) argued that ‘capacity building’ trumped ‘judgementalism’ with:

Savvy change leaders become good at identifying problems, being candid about their presence, and yet being empathetic enough that the person affected does not feel personally judged.

In his work on educational research in relation to policy making and practice, Hammersley (2002) initially focused on trying to explain the expansion in this
field. He proposed that the growth in educational research was part of the movement to professionalise teaching, something he suggested has been developing since the 1960s. He argued that educational research had often been politicised, usually social research, and mainly qualitative in methodological terms. He cited Hargreaves (1996), who suggested that teaching should be a research based profession, however, researchers were to blame for not doing the kind of research that was necessary to serve evidence based practice. Hargreaves, cited in Hammersley (2002:15) advocated that:

_Pra<ref>ctitioners and policy makers must take an active role in shaping the direction of educational research._

In their work on effective leadership for the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), Harris and Chapman (2002: summary p.1) undertook a small scale study into what makes for effective leadership in schools that are working in challenging circumstances. The first stage was a literature review followed by case study material from ten schools. They identified three main findings. Firstly, that effective leaders in such schools were constantly managing tensions and problems. Secondly, effective leaders were people-centred:

_The leadership practice of head teachers in this study was underpinned by a set of personal and professional values that placed human needs before organisational needs._

Finally, they proposed that effective leaders were able to combine a moral purpose with a willingness to be collaborative and promote collaboration amongst colleagues. They summarised their research findings into a belief that effective leaders in schools believe that all children can learn and succeed, offer leadership that is value-driven with a strong moral purpose, build a sense of community and shape culture. They also placed greater emphasis upon forms of leadership that are people-orientated, transformational and empowering. Some of the personal qualities
demonstrated by such leaders were identified in the report by Harris and Chapman (2002: summary p.2) as:

- **highly pragmatic, resilient and determined individuals who work towards changing negative attitudes towards and within their school.**
- **place educational concerns over management concerns. They create schools that are culturally tight but managerially flexible.**
- **are primarily concerned with helping people understand the problems they face rather than solve them.**
- **place an emphasis upon models of professional development that impact directly upon classroom practice.**
- **invest in the learning of staff and pupils**

This illustrated an important point for this research in posing the question of whether change was more about *people* or *roles* within an organisation. There was a clear danger that, without a clear purpose and agreed focus, change may be an activity in itself, rather than change with a purpose to improve the expected outcomes. Whilst structures are important as they help people be clear where their work fits into an organisation, the research by the NCSL illustrated that organisations benefit when people feel *part of* processes, and know how and where their work fits with the work of others. This was particularly significant when looking at the role of secondary SENCo as there were expectations on the role laid out in the Code of Practice, but various interpretations of that role in practice in individual settings.

In *Business Planning in the Public Sector*, Bean (1997) made an important observation that was relevant to this area of research. She identified that in private sector organisations it was clear that they are run primarily for profit, however, the public sector was driven by social, political and economic forces. The last decade had seen a clear change in the Public Sector in that the requirement for more efficient and effective use of public resources, and the demand for greater transparency in the use of tax payers money, had put Local Government, along with other public sector organisations, in a position where they need to operate within a clearer framework of accountability.

This was confirmed in the work of Kotter (1996:3) who suggested that due to
the economic pressure on all organisations:

More and more organisations will be pushed to reduce costs, improve the quality of products and service, locate new opportunities for growth, and increase productivity.

The public sector was clearly not exempt from these pressures with the economic situation posing particular challenges for Education. In order to produce improved outcomes, on often reduced budgets, it would clearly be advantageous for managers to be clear about what needed changing, what those changes needed to be, how those changes would be supported and managed, and how the impact of those changes would be evaluated. This would also be important in ensuring that potential changes could then be prioritised and justified amongst competing priorities. It would also be helpful in assessing the potential short and long term impact of such changes. This was equally true for each individual secondary school setting as it was at a Local Authority level.

To support this research, the literature review determined to investigate the role of the individual school leader in relation to leading change. This was an interesting role particularly within the secondary setting. Although leading a Primary school setting demanded extensive skills relating to leadership and management this study identified that a focus on literature that looked at leadership of secondary school settings would most help this research.

Although the NCSL were clear what makes an effective school leader, Kotter (1996:51) confirmed that no ‘one’ individual was likely to ever be able to successfully achieve change. Building a team was an essential part of the change process. For this research it became clear that the ‘team’ committed to change must represent all stakeholders involved in the change project at secondary level - managers, practitioners in schools and central services, partners in other Local Authorities and the Welsh Government. All had significant roles to play in the change ‘team’ – what Kotter identified as the ‘guiding coalition’. If the statutory framework was to focus on improving the life chances of some of the most vulnerable learners in the system, then all
partners in the large organisations that some secondary settings can be needed to work together to ensure the practice was implemented as the statute intended.

The research of Belbin (1996:82) also contended that it was unlikely that any organisation was well served by relying on one strategic leader, although there was a need for a strategic function providing firm leadership. Schools, however, were not simply ‘organisations’, they were more like ‘organisms’ – living, breathing, people-centred structures that depended heavily on the culture and climate that a key manager created. Head teachers of large settings could lead, block or delay change. In practice, they could make, or break, initiatives or change activities. What this research had to explore was the key role of the head teacher in relation to the development and effectiveness of each role within the broad agenda of supporting pupils who were vulnerable to underachievement. Belbin advocated ‘team empowerment’ where work was organised at a local level and the emphasis shifted from tasks to output.

Fullan (2010:59) further explored the role of leader and offered a helpful definition on transparency. He identified that there was a strong relationship between being non-judgemental in your work and having transparency in what you do:

Transparency is about openness of results in all its subcategories and about what sociologists call deprivatisation of practice. It is almost inevitable these days with the demands for accountability and access to information.

The work supported the belief that no profession would thrive unless it was prepared to measure itself, and be prepared to be open about what it was doing. It appeared incongruous that the concept of ‘love’, (often seen as the emotion associated with intense personal or private relationships), would be seen by Fullan (2010:66) as key to the successful management of change. His work provided clarity on what he meant by this concept.
There is a central tendency in most people to respond accordingly to how they are treated. And a degree of self fulfilling prophesy will be at work.

The final core concept about change that Fullan (2010: Chapter 9) explored was that of ‘leadership for all’. He advocated a paradox that the more expert you become at managing change, the more humble you become as a change agent. The goal for effective change leaders was that you develop more effective leaders, so that the effect can be multiplied.

In an extensive 30 year study called the Change Over Time? project Hargreaves and Goodson (2006: 5) studied eight American and Canadian high schools, from 1970 through to the 1990s. Their research suggested that:

Although many innovations can be implemented successfully with effective leadership, sufficient investment and strong internal, and external, support, very few innovations reach the institutionalization stage where they become a routine and effortless part of most teachers’ practice.

They proposed that producing real improvement that lasts and spreads throughout an institution, remained an ‘elusive goal’ of most educational change efforts. Their argument was that as most change is not tracked over any extended period of time, few initiatives are ever sufficiently, or rigorously, evaluated for the impact they have had in the longer term. Their study, based on over 200 interviews, triangulated with school observations, supplementary documentation and data sources, proposed that there were five major change forces that individually, and together, could lead to substantial change of direction in secondary schools. The first change force was that called ‘waves of reform’. It was defined as waves of change in a distinct historical period in the life of the school – such as the appointment of a new national political lead – that generated change that staff either resisted or embraced. Another force linked to change was that of ‘leadership succession’ Hargreaves and Goodson (2006: 32) described this as:

Changes of leaders and leadership that most directly and dramatically provoke change in individual schools.
Their third change force was identified as student and community demographics where factors such as an increase in immigration, or a reduction in birth rates resulted in a change of pupil composition that then necessitated changes within the way the school worked. Their fourth change force was identified as teacher generations, which was described as finding the *generational centre of gravity* so that, based on the demographics of the staff, change was dominated by the largest number who are at a particular age or career stage. Thus, the generation of ‘baby boomers’ from the 1970s who were the innovators and change agents by the1990s became those most likely to resist change. The final factor acting as a change force was identified as school interrelations. This showed that no school over the period of the study could act as an ‘island’. The impact schools had on each other was identified as a strong influence on the direction of change an individual school took, either as a proactive move or as a reactive decision to not be left behind as other institutions changed. In summary (2006:35), they concluded that much research into educational change had trivialized the concept of sustainability:

*Among researchers, change needs to be viewed in the rear view mirror of reflection and not just placed in the service of policy makers’ driving ambition for political success … sustainability of educational improvement is unlikely to occur without a theory and a strategy that is more historically and politically informed.*

The learning from such research was useful to apply to this research undertaking. For the Welsh Government, the need to ensure that changes in statute lead to long term and sustainable change for the better was potentially their greatest challenge. Educational policy would never be totally disconnected from political agendas, however, potential changes could learn from such research and had an opportunity to be rooted in learning based on extensive educational practice. The learning from research such as this could not be underestimated. The political agenda for education in Wales was a relentless drive to improve standards. Research *must* offer evidence to ensure that change was not proposed and implemented because it was
politically expedient, but, rather, because it was educationally sound. What was then explored through the literature was the research that had explored the response to change, particularly the concept of resistance to change.

2.4 Resistance to change

In his discussion paper, *53 Interesting Ways in Which Colleagues Resist Change*, Outram (2004) identified a range of different strategies employed to resist change. These he categorised from passive resistance, such as fault finding and criticism, through to various forms of active resistance including withholding information or general procrastination. He suggested some detailed explanation for resistance to change proposing ‘inertia’ as the belief that it takes considerable force to get a large body to change direction which, therefore, makes it particularly difficult to achieve. Outram concluded that whatever the reasons cited as resistance to change, they all clearly represented a failure to lead and manage change effectively and promptly. This would be particularly important when looking to prepare for statutory change on a national level.

In 2010, in a presentation at an educational conference in South East Wales as part of her work for the Welsh Government on the *School Effectiveness Framework*, Professor Alma Harris proposed that change was not a linear, rational, structured process but was, rather, an emotional process and one where you had to manage people’s emotions and responses. She argued that you should expect resistance as a natural response to change, but would get greater connection to the process if people feel involved in something that they feel may be likely to succeed. She suggested that people had to feel supported to step out of what she referred to as their “ring of competence”, to try new things, and extend their own learning. This was not easy as it involved personal risk. Professor Harris (SEWC Conference 2010) drew on her work with large organisations and concluded that,

*Nothing stops an organisation faster than people who believe that the way they worked yesterday is the best way to work tomorrow.*
Her conclusions presented to the conference were that change was only sustainable when it was internally generated, not externally prescribed, learner and results focused which then became innovation rich. In a framework that became self reviewing, she suggested that, ultimately this would lead to “real change from within”.

Learning from this work on managing change, and managing those who might resist it, led to a further area of study into the importance of the notion of ‘culture’ within organisations.

2.5 The importance of ‘culture’ in successfully managing change

In reading about both educational and business change, there were numerous references to the place of ‘culture’ in changing how organisations work. For the purposes of this research, Kotter’s (1996:10) definition of culture was used in that the term ‘culture’ represented ‘norms of behaviour and shared values among a group of people.’ He warned that culture could powerfully influence human behaviour and could be difficult to change. It was worth noting his other observation which was that, because it has near invisibility, this made it hard to address directly. He concluded:

\[\text{Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people’s actions after the new behaviour produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement.} \]
\[(Kotter, 1996:156)\]

Belbin (1996:85) was clear that cultures could be changed. Not as one might presume by training, education or force, but through what he identified as ‘organisational transformation’. In my experience as a manager, there was often a significant difficulty in large organisations in communicating a clear vision for the work being undertaken, so it was useful to remember what Belbin suggested in his claim that it was the transformed organisation that created its own culture - in a culture where behaviours develop predictable patterns. This would not be through individuals sharing the same personal
values, but through the organisation shaping how values could be expressed through behaviours. If this was true, this research had to take account of the point that, whilst sharing a clear vision was important, it was equally valid to focus on expected behaviours. This would be a significant factor to explore in this research, when the leadership of individual institutions was examined.

This was confirmed in the work of Kotter (1996:76) who also provided significant evidence regarding the relationship between change and culture in organisations. He concluded that change sticks only when it became ‘the way we do things around here’. He suggested two factors that were of particular relevance in anchoring new approaches in an organisation’s culture. The first needed to be a conscious attempt to show people how specific behaviours and attitudes had helped improve performance, and the second was that the next generation of management must personify the new approach. If criteria for effective management were not reshaped, he argued that transformation rarely lasted.

In contrast, Hussey (2000) refuted the suggestion that human beings always resisted change as a popular ‘myth’ that defied historical fact. He argued that humans were the most adaptable animals. He concluded that change was more about the balance between threat and empowerment. He identified the concept of the ‘psychological contract’, his terminology for those unwritten things that are in a job. The difficulty, he explained, was that managers were not always aware of what others believe to be in the psychological contract – until it was under threat. This was particularly significant for this research when a role had already been interpreted in settings as to how the job was to be done against criteria in the Code of Practice that was open to a variety of interpretations. In analysing the causes of resistance, Hussey proposed a series of actions, and a framework, to reduce resistance. He presented eight factors that were integral to a functioning change process and concluded that culture could not be changed in isolation. He suggested that people, reward systems, control systems, structure, tasks, decision processes and information systems needed to be in harmony with culture if successful change was to be implemented. In an educational context it was useful to
remember that people in education, just as in the business sector, rarely worked solely for financial motivation, particularly in an occupation associated with a vocation, such as teaching. Hussey’s point was that you had to live what you say in a change culture. Systems and processes needed to validate the messages of culture that leaders and managers were communicating to staff. How this was done in individual schools needed to be further explored in the research.

In his work, *How to Manage Organisational Change*, Hussey (2000) explored types of change and concluded that the benefits of change could be easily lost if change was badly managed. He presented a range of types of change that were useful to help identify what was likely to be the most successful approach. By plotting the relationship between urgency and resistance, he offered a matrix of effective approaches to change. Exploring how schools balanced the need for change and the desire to stay with past processes and practices would be an interesting theme to follow in individual settings.

In their work in managing change in the business sector, Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010:xxi) identified that there have been decades of debate about the balance between changes at an individual level and organisational change. They summarised the debate as:

*Change the people or change the structure, carefully plan change versus let it unfold, manage change versus consciously lead it and focus on process versus outcome.*

They identified that successful change management was a requirement in the business sector to ensure continued success and that, in an increasingly competitive marketplace, the skill of leading change management was now a critical topic on the minds of business leaders. Their research findings (2010:2) led them to conclude there was too much focus on employee resistance to change, and an over reliance on how to plan the implementation of change. Ackerman-Anderson (2010:2) proposed that business leaders needed to move beyond the management of change into
what they defined as ‘conscious change leadership’, a new set of skills and a deeper understanding of change:

To co-creating a positive future through successful, well run, transformational change efforts….leaders themselves must transform to lead transformation successfully in their organisation….implementing change processes that build commitment in stakeholders, transform cultures and achieve results beyond what others would deem possible.

They proposed that there were four aspects needed to be worked through to successfully transform organisations at this deeper level. These were mindset, behaviour, culture and systems. They argued that if these four aspects were not addressed at individual, relationship, team, organisational and marketplace level, then failure to address one of these dimensions would result in a failure to achieve, or sustain, fundamental and truly transformational change.

Educational change may not operate within the same context as that of the business sector, but there was still much to learn from research in that field. Increasingly, it appeared, the public sector was being driven by strong political, social and economic forces that would cause it to behave more in line with a business model. Managing changes in the field of education would need to draw upon such research if it too wanted to lead and manage change that was truly ‘transformational’.

Finally, the literature review looked at the developments taking place in the same field in England to identify what could be learned for this research.

2.6 Developments in England

In 2006, the then Education and Skills Select Committee produced a report on SEN in England. They recorded a number of concerns about the role, and status, of the SENCo. They identified that the SENCo should be a qualified teacher and that they should be properly trained. In response to the work of
the committee, Ministers formulated the Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) Regulation (2008). This came into force in September 2009, and required SENCos in England to be qualified teachers. An amendment was added to the Regulation in 2009 providing additional legislation regarding SENCo training. The effect of the regulation and its amendments were that in England a SENCo must be a qualified teacher who had satisfactorily completed an induction period. There were conditions to enable a period of transition to the new legislation.

Unlike England, which had introduced this tighter legislative framework, the Welsh framework allowed for the role of SENCo to be undertaken by a non teaching member of staff, including teaching assistants. It made no statutory requirement for SENCos to be qualified teachers, or to participate in any mandatory training programme. What was emphasised throughout the literature review was that there was a fundamental need to understand what the role was intended to achieve, so that it could be determined whether this was appropriate, or necessary, to be the work of a qualified teacher.

In their work on Policy Analysis (2003:11), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stated that:

*Meeting the educational needs of students is part of the development of equitable provision in an inclusive society where individual rights are recognised and protected. Failure to provide education and create the conditions for individual progress may be seen as a denial of a child’s rights.*

The literature review continued to explore evidence on school leadership and how it related to the implementation of national policies, particularly when the role was that of a middle, rather than a senior, manager. Blandford and Gibson (2002:2) presented a paper at a European Conference on Educational Research. Their paper, *Middle Management in Schools: a Special Educational Needs Perspective* was based on their premise that:

*In practice, school managers create, maintain and develop conditions which enable effective learning to take place.*
They argued that the rise of the middle manager in schools could be compared to the creation of the middle classes in Victorian England, in that both were created as a response to increases in bureaucracy and increased administration. They concluded that the introduction of the SEN Code of Practice in England was a watershed for this area of work as it brought together all the previous legislation and practices into a clear statutory framework, but cited the previous work of Derrington (1996) in suggesting that the consequence of the Code was a management role of the SENCo that had a tendency to spiral out of control. Blandford and Gibson (2000:27) proposed that, in a positive way, the Code had clearly defined the list of SENCo responsibilities, such as the day to day operation of the SEN Policy and liaison with other professionals, but that in its application in practice, the implementation of the Code was extremely difficult because:

*Three potential barriers to the successful management of the role (are); lack of status, inadequate training and insufficient time to fulfil the duties.*

Their paper argued (p.28) that the ‘functionalist’ management approach to the role of SENCo did not work:

*It may be the case that functionalism, with set lists and value-free approach to operational decision-making, cannot effectively provide for the multi-dimensional role of the SENCo involving the juggling of identities; teacher and manager.*

They suggested that what was needed was a more fluid approach to management, with delegation and active managerial support. They cited Foster (1989) who attempted to move past functionalism with an approach to management based on the ability to critically reflect on practice and thinking. For this research it highlighted a critical issue for SENCos which was the relationship between the SENCo role and the implementation of policy, procedures and practice. Their work highlighted the tension between meeting statutory requirements, and meeting professional standards identified by regulators.
Initially using the method of case studies with a qualitative ethnographic approach, Blandford and Gibson (2000:53) continued with a wider quantitative study comprising of a postal questionnaire, followed by telephone interviews across a number of countries. Using a cross sectional design with urban, suburban and rural schools they identified that a dominant issue for all was the need to define the role of manager and teacher. Based on the interview data, their research identified that, *In order to understand the nature of their job, middle managers needed to consider their teaching responsibilities within the context of their management role. This is not merely an issue of line management, but also of the compatibility between the two roles. The middle managers considered that if practitioner’s values and beliefs are transferable to management practice, teaching and middle managers can co-exist quite successful. If, however, individuals adopted values and beliefs in their management role which differed from their values and beliefs as a practitioner, this will be problematic.*

This tension between management and practice had a significant impact on the nature of the SENCo’s relationship with colleagues, and their success in the role. Their research found that there was a distinctive status to being a manager. SENCos as middle managers were identified as ‘player managers’ where knowing what was required of their role was identified as key. Their recommendation was that, to be effective managers, SENCos needed to adopt a ‘clustering’ approach where the role worked collaboratively with all partners to realise effective practice in management. At the heart of this effective practice was the issue of effective communication.

Although written in relation to the English context, and over a decade ago, there was much to take note of in Blandford and Gibson’s extensive piece of work. There was further work to do on unpacking the factors that impact on SENCo effectiveness. Their research had a focus on the views of the post holders, it had no identified objective to draw upon any broader research evidence base. Although these should not be dismissed or ignored as they are a valuable source of evidence, there were other sources of evidence such as the views of head teachers in the SENCOS settings that were likely to support the research into this area of potential change in national policy.
These also included the analysis of structures, job descriptions and responsibilities as well as a more detailed look at the impact of the role and organisation had on learner outcomes.

A more recently published piece of research in England was commissioned by NASEN, the National Association for Special Educational Needs teachers. This was published by Pearson (2008) under the title, *Deafened by silence or by the sounds of the footsteps?* The research purpose was identified as two-fold - gathering up to date information from English SENCos and following up further research NASEN had commissioned previously into the recruitment, induction and retention of SENCos. The sample was acquired through two postal questionnaire sent to 500 SENCos. The first sample was those in one large local authority, with another sample sent to a supplement list of serving members of NASEN. The research aimed to cover all types of settings, and all geographical areas of England.

It should be noted that the research findings were based on a return rate of 53% with two hundred and sixty six questionnaires being returned. This was 36.5 per cent for Local Authority SENCos and 61.3 per cent of NASEN members. A number of reasons were given for this, including the request being made at a busy time of the school year and the research coinciding with a postal dispute. Even within this context, some of the findings were significant, particularly in that 8.6 per cent of the 266 total respondents were not qualified teachers. The question that leads on from this data was what, if any, difference would this evidence make regarding the quality of work being undertaken by the people undertaking the current role? This research did not ask what restrictions the lack of Qualified Teacher Status put on undertaking the duties of SENCo.

In relation to financial remuneration, their research findings did not appear to find a significant correlation between the percentage of pupils with SEN within the school, and the status of the role, although there was some evidence that, in the schools with higher numbers of learners with a statement of SEN, the SENCo was more likely to have a higher allowance.
Although higher pay may imply a more senior position in the organisation within the setting, the questionnaire used in the NASEN research did not enable this to be further examined. Respondents were asked to explain the time allocation made available to their role, and the actual time spent on their duties. Although caution needed to be exercised when data was solely self reported, it was interesting to note in their findings that there appeared to be a correlation in the primary school sector between the hours associated with the role, and the number of pupils with SEN in the school but there was no correlation at secondary level. As primary school arrangements allowed a greater flexibility in timetabling that a secondary school setting, it may be that primary practitioners had more control over how their time was deployed. As arrangements in the secondary sector may be more rigid and complex, this was confirmation for me that specifically focusing on the secondary SENCo role would produce data that reflected the greater variance in the secondary setting of how current legislation was interpreted. This would potentially facilitate a more representative picture of the current situation for practitioners and more successfully address the research objectives in the present research.

A clear suggestion from the NASEN research was that their data suggested that some secondary practitioners were spending significant amounts of time on the role, with no financial recognition. It was difficult to quantify what proportion of the secondary SENCo population this was as the data gathering in the research did not offer clarity on this point. Another issue with the NASEN questionnaire was that it aimed to explore what the status of the SENCo was in their setting. The results suggested that 71 per cent of primary SENCOs were on the senior management team within their schools, compared to 33 per cent of the secondary school counterparts. However, the research failed to ascertain whether they were on the senior management team because they were SENCo, or whether that was for some other reason. The research results appeared to suggest that the role of SENCo was often part of a portfolio of duties undertaken by senior managers particularly in primary settings. In terms of the perceptions of the respondents, 74 per cent perceived a mismatch between what they thought their role needed to do,
and what they actually did do. The most frequently commented theme was in relation to the difficulty of balancing the demands of bureaucracy with other responsibilities such as teaching, advising colleagues and strategic planning. One secondary respondent with five years experience made the following comment:

The SENCo role has broadened and is becoming increasingly demanding over the last five years….I have resigned because I find it impossible to fulfil the Head of Inclusion role and teach half a timetable. (Pearson, 2008:104)

In conclusion, the research of Pearson (2008:106) suggested:

The data highlight both the commonalities and the uniqueness of individuals and their circumstances. There are examples of SENCos who have made a long term commitment to the role, who have management roles in their schools, and who have undertaken training including achieving qualifications, sometimes at their own expense. However, the situation is far from uniform and it is possible to identify the antithesis of this. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the variability, attitudes towards the role and the perception of its desirability differ.

There were a number of articles written in educational journals by practitioners regarding their role as SENCo. Lingard (2003), a secondary SENCo in a large comprehensive setting, argued that the requirements of the Code in terms of the management and administrative tasks detracted from his capacity to support pupils with SEN as a specialist practitioner in this field of work.

In a series of papers edited by Hallett and Hallett (2010:3), a number of practitioners and academics evaluated the impact of changes in England in relation to the SENCo role. All reflected the impact on the changing role. In their introduction this was summarised as:

The SENCo is both an agent of change for individual pupils, and a change agent for schools, that is, it is a process management role, and a strategic management role.....this would seem to place the SENCo at the centre of the school development process, able to meet the needs of all pupils, while providing a focus for those with additional needs.
The current research evidence and reports within this field identified a need for research to go beyond the anecdotal, towards a framework that could be implemented to support best practice. This needed to be based on a collection of data regarding what already worked within the field and a clearer identification and understanding of the relative importance of identified factors that impact on the effectiveness of the individual post holder. How they met the requirements of the post in relation to ensuring compliance to the statutory requirements of the Code of Practice, and how they balanced this with being the professional lead in ensuring all staff within a school setting were improving outcomes for learners with additional learning needs, was clearly a challenge for them.

2.7 Literature review conclusions

Much of the evidence from the literature review into the management of change provided evidence that successful change did not happen without planning and, as the National College for School Leadership (2002) confirmed, had to be well led and managed. Presuppositions about people being reluctant to change would not be helpful as this might prejudge any actions that might follow the change process. Similarly, there was also evidence that presuming change would just ‘happen’ successfully was not an appropriate strategy to employ. Managing change successfully appeared to be a combination of inter-related factors that relied on good relationships, clarity of vision, rigorous implementation and robust monitoring and evaluation.

Belbin (1996:96) reminded us of the view that nothing changes without reason. He suggested that for one system to replace another smoothly and effectively, two conditions were needed - the first being a sense of disillusionment with the old system, and the second being some beckoning model of the new. In relation to this research, there was already a nationally identified dissatisfaction with the current arrangements and statutory
framework expressed through the professional network of ADEW meetings. If Belbin’s research (1996) was correct in this view, then there were already some of the conditions to support a smooth and effective transition to a new system, generated with the support of educational practitioners themselves.

The purposes of educational research are many and varied. Carr and Kemmis (1986:136) stated that it should:

Inform and guide the practices of educators by indicating the actions that they need to take if they are to overcome their problems or eliminate their difficulties.

This is particularly true of research for a professional doctorate that is rooted in professional practice, as well as needing to have a thorough understanding of the current professional theory. Through reading undertaken for this review, what became clear to me was that, within the context within which this research was to be undertaken, what was needed was research that was supported by those engaged in education itself, so that educational practices could be transformed from the inside.

The literature review of current research in this area enabled me to learn from others to avoid difficulties experienced in previous research. In social science research the perceptions of those involved is important evidence - people need to tell their stories. This research determined to attempt to balance the voices of practising SENCos with evidence that the context of their work, and the colleagues who worked with them, could also provide.
Chapter 3  The Research Approach

This research was intended to underpin statutory change, and, consequently, have an impact on national practice. Whatever the research methodology, this research would only be valid, as Denzin and Lincoln (1998:200) explained, if there was a transparency to the methods employed:

So that, (a) the reader will be confident of, and can verify, reported conclusions; (b) secondary analysis of the data is possible; (c) the study could in principle be replicated; and (d) fraud or misconduct, if it exists, will be more traceable.

This, of course, applies to all research, but what was important to me as a researcher and practitioner was that this research was grounded in practical knowledge and the realities of the field whilst also taking place within an academic research framework. That balance would need to be achieved. The first step was to confirm the chosen methodology.

3.1 Choosing the research methodology

This research took place in the field of education and the chosen methodology needed to ensure that the results could contribute to a potential change in professional practice. The choice of the methodology would, for the most part, be predicated on the nature of the research questions, which, in turn, were a function of the research context. The aim of this research was to investigate the current effectiveness of the role of SENCo in the secondary school setting in Wales. This led to the development of a series of research objectives that started to identify the direction of the research process. These objectives were then supported by research questions that provided further support to me as a new researcher. The first objective related to the context of the research and had focused on three main questions:

- What is the current statutory framework and is it clear?
- What (if any) research has already taken place into the role of the Secondary SENCo?
• What impact does politics have on the development and implementation of ‘sound’ educational policy?

These first three research questions, and thus the first objective, had been addressed through the review of the literature. Using this approach it provided a framework that helped structure further stages of the research process. To start supporting the achievement of the subsequent research objectives, the additional research questions were confirmed:

• What are the expectations on the role of SENCo in the secondary sector?
• Is the role clear particularly in relation to the balance of the role as leader and manager in a setting?
• How do practitioners measure their own professional effectiveness?
• How do head teachers and school leaders measure the effectiveness of the SENCo role?
• What impact does the head teacher and culture of the school have on the development of vision, culture and whole school practice for SEN in an institution?
• What factors are common across responses that may indicate what has a significant impact of effectiveness?
• What recommendations can be drawn from the responses given by practitioners, settings and outcomes of the research?

To ensure that the research aim would be achieved, the literature review was extended to extensively explore what was in the literature concerning the choice of both methodology and methods in research. Hart (1998:27) offered a definition of ‘methodology’ as:

A system of methods and rules to facilitate the collection and analysis of data. It provides the starting point for choosing an approach made up of theories, ideas, concepts and definitions of the topic, therefore the basis of a critical activity consisting of making choices about the nature and character of the social world...this should not be confused with techniques of research, the application of methodology.
As a researcher, I had an overarching research intention and methodological purpose, which affected what methods were chosen to gather the data.

A mixed methods approach was chosen within the case study methodology. It used questionnaires, interviews and scrutiny of documentation as the primary sources of evidence. This provided a range of results that would not be achieved through the implementation of a single method. As a new researcher, and to aid the development of the research, a simple research protocol (below) was drafted to guide the process.

A Introduction - initial development of the research
1) Confirm research aim
2) Develop hypothesis, research questions and objectives
3) Collect evidence for theoretical framework – undertake literature review and use it to confirm methodology and methods
4) Collect questionnaire evidence from a broad sample - Phase 1
5) Develop case studies for more in depth focus on fewer settings – Phase 2

B Data collection
1) Prepare questionnaires
2) Trial and test questionnaires
3) Identify useful background data to support cases
4) Plan interviews
5) Collect documentation
6) Undertake interviews

C Case study report
1) Identify the framework for writing up separate cases
2) Preserve research evidence separate from the report:
a) data
b) auditory recordings
c) document analysis
d) interview notes
D  Research evaluation

1) Draw cross case research conclusions
2) Revisit research question and objectives
3) Present conclusions

Although the methodology chosen for this research project was that of case study its purpose had to be clear. This was not to tell the story of individual practitioners but, rather, as Simons (2009:70) suggested:

*To understand how the experience and actions of a single person or persons contributed to an understanding of the case...exploring individual’s histories and the social context of their experience offers clues to such understanding and helps you interpret the meaning and effect of their role and experience in the case.*

Simon’s (2009) definitions of terminology were useful in acknowledging that there is little consistency in the literature concerning case study research, with researchers often using the term to mean either a method, a strategy or an approach. She offered the following definitions: method being the techniques of research including interviewing and observing, strategy being the processes, both educational and ethical, and approach being the way by which we gain and maintain access to that case study. The dictionary definition of a case study was simplistic but helpful:

*A study of an individual unit, as a person, family, or social group, usually emphasizing developmental issues and relationships with the environment, especially in order to compare a larger group to the individual unit.*

Before explaining the detail of the research methods, I found it helpful to explore the research methodologies of both qualitative and quantitative research to ensure the chosen research approach had academic credibility to support research that also had a focus on changing professional practice. The decision to use a mixed methods approach also prompted this research to learn from research developments in this area.
3.2 Qualitative and quantitative research

Researchers tend to align their work in relation to the research approach they are employing. Two significant methodological approaches are those of qualitative and quantitative research.

Quantitative research has often been associated with the laboratory or specialised research settings, whereas qualitative research has often been used to understand, describe, or even explain, social actions or behaviours. Flick (2007:xi) advocated that the use of qualitative research was by no means a ‘softer’ option as it was trying to approach the outside world by either examining the experiences of individuals or groups, analysing their interactions and communications or analysing documentation. There was a substantial body of writing that explored the merits of, and differences between, quantitative and qualitative research. Flick (2007:x) was keen to point out:

Qualitative research is no longer just simply ‘not quantitative research’, but has developed an identity, (or maybe multiple identities) of its own.

Miles and Huberman (1994:37) explained:

Qualitative research is essentially an investigative process...one makes gradual sense of a social phenomenon.... and does it in large part by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of one’s study.

As qualitative researchers were interested in accessing experiences in their natural context, there would always be a challenge to ensure there was good quality assurance when using this methodology. Their work suggested;

All of these approaches represent ways of meaning, which can be reconstructed and analysed with different qualitative methods that allow the researcher to develop (more or less generalisable) models, typologies, theories as ways of describing and explaining social issues.

In their work on educational research, Brown and Dowling (1998:82)
explained that quantitative and qualitative research approaches had often been set against each other. Many researchers argued that with quantitative research what you gained with reliability, you lost in validity. Their definition of these two approaches was helpful:

**Qualitative approaches are often associated with research which is carried out in an interpretative frame in which the concern is with the production of meaning. Quantitative methods are correspondingly associated with positivist forms of enquiry which are concerned with the search for facts.**

The review of literature undertaken for this research concurred with Hammersley (2002:124) who identified that, in educational research, there had often been the implication that qualitative research could not deliver the sorts of findings that were required for evidence based practice. His work compared a number of scientific and practical enquiries that identified and emphasised the strengths and weaknesses of various kinds of research. He argued:

**Failure to recognise the variety of forms that social and educational research can take, and their relative strengths and weaknesses, is one source of the difficulties the researchers often face in deciding how best to pursue their work.**

In her work, Simons (2009) cited a quiet methodological revolution taking place over the last few decades, with the growth of extensive methodological literature regarding the use of qualitative data in research. With qualitative data, comparative analysis could be undertaken such as is used in grounded theory, for example, by comparing interview responses to detect patterns and commonalities. This, when done well, could be extremely effective. A perceived weakness with qualitative research was that you were not always able to present results as ‘facts’, something which meant you were not always able to rule out other variables. However, this may well be a truer reflection of the practice, as there are rarely, if ever, absolute answers in the field. Flick (2007:xi) identified that this type of research does bring a different strength to the researcher’s tool kit:
Qualitative research refrains from setting up a well-defined concept of what is studied and from formulating hypotheses in the beginning in order to test them. Rather, concepts (or hypotheses if they are used) are developed in the process of research.

What needed further exploration was the developing body of work into a mixed methods approach to research.

3.3 Using a mixed methods approach

Using a mixed methods approach had grown in popularity in recent research. As Symonds and Gorard (2010:127) explained:

Despite the limitations of the current form of mixed methods, it must be noted that throughout its development, mixed methods has acquired and also independently defined several key techniques important to good practice in integrating types of data. These include an extensive focus on triangulation and innovative research designs for promoting integration and data synthesis.

In educational research mixed method research developed as a response to the need to employ methods that supported the research in the ability to transcend subjectivity. Symonds and Gorard (2010: 317) explained how this approach was developed:

The classification by many scholars of numerical research processes as quantitative and other research techniques as qualitative has prompted the construction of a third category, that of ‘mixed methods’, to describe studies that use elements from both processes.

They cited work of recent authors, including Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:4), who, they proposed, had moved towards a perspective that was perhaps more authentic to the context, by describing quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods as the ‘outlooks’ of communities of researchers who were doing research in the social and behavioural sciences. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007:118) sought to formalise a definition of
mixed methods by synthesising the perspectives from 31 researchers in the field. They concluded that mixed methods research was where researchers combine elements:

*For the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.*

Symonds and Gorard (2010) continued their argument that research should be bound by neither the labels of ‘quantitative’, ‘quantitative’ or ‘mixed methods’ if research was going to develop unhindered.

The results of an extensive evaluation of mixed methods being used in educational research over a ten year period were presented in a paper by Truscott et al. (2010:323). They concluded that mixed methods were not the predominant method being used in educational research in the past two decades however:

*There has been a surge in discourse around the topic of mixed methods research and its potential as a valuable research tool. The results of this study reveal the struggles currently facing the research community. It is clear that researchers are using qualitative, quantitative, and mixtures of qualitative and quantitative methods in a variety of ways. Furthermore, studies defined as mixed methods have been produced steadily over the past decade across the journals we examined.*

Consequently, the conclusion I made from exploring the literature was that it would be too simplistic to determine that qualitative research would be less rigorous than quantitative research. Rather, it had to be a choice as to which methodology ensured I was able fully to explore the research question and which research approach enabled me to employ the most effective methodology to result in the best quality research process. It also became clear that it might also be useful to employ elements of both methodologies using a mixed methods approach to research.

Whatever the chosen approach, it was clear that the research being undertaken would have to look at the processes it would need to employ to
ensure good quality assurance of the research approach.

### 3.4 Quality assurance in research

Ensuring the reliability of research is a challenge to an experienced researcher. For me as a new researcher, it was potentially even more of a challenge. As the research unfolded, the issue of quality became increasingly important. Having explored the work of those such as Lincoln and Guba (1985:289) who advocated the need for credibility and trustworthiness, a number of researchers such as Stake, writing in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2005) and Yin (2010) identified critical factors to consider in the developing research process that related more to validity and reliability. They suggested that both are important to maximise the quality of the case study evidence. This was useful for me as much of the data collected could be interpreted as ‘perception’, rather than objective ‘fact.’ In undertaking research into the role of the secondary school SENCo these concepts would need to be reflected on and could prove helpful to use as a guide on the collection of research data.

In the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985:289ff) they suggested five strategies that would increase the credibility of qualitative research. These included ‘prolonged engagement’ in the field or what they call ‘persistent observation’. They suggested this was a means of increasing the likelihood of credible results. Regular ‘peer debriefing’ – that of sharing the research in order to identify one’s own blind spots - ‘member’s checks’ in the sense of communicative validation by members of the field under study, as well as the analysis of negative cases and the appropriateness of the terms of reference were all identified as factors that could increase the trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of quantitative research. How this was supported in this research will be further explored later in this chapter.

Any attempt to standardise qualitative research ran a significant risk of losing the strengths that this research method achieved. However, as qualitative
research relied on the interaction between human beings, there needed to be significant checks to ensure that this type of research maintained its credibility. Miles and Huberman (1994:46) confirmed that it was appropriate and;

_Not too extreme to ask of yourself ‘how valid and reliable is this person likely to be as an information gathering instrument?’_

This highlighted the issue of quality in this type of qualitative research. The need for careful consideration of results has been increasingly discussed among researchers. Flick (2007: 5) explained that the problem of looking at the issue of quality in qualitative research was that:

_Qualitative research is a kind of ‘umbrella term’- what approaches only have in common sometimes is that they are not quantitative research!_

It was clear that different types of data were useful in different contexts. Data has be carefully explained and interpreted so that it is clear what that data represented. The term ‘data’ also needed clarification. Brown and Dowling (1998:49) reminded the researcher:

_It is helpful to make the distinction between information and data. ‘Data’ refers to information that has been read in terms of an explicitly available theoretical framework and/or collected via an explicit methodological framework._

Although the method of data collection in qualitative research was often that undertaken through interview, evidence of this nature still had to be able to be interrogated. Miles and Huberman (1984:50) confirmed:

_Field notes must be converted into write ups either through typing or dictation. A ‘write up’ is a product intelligible to anyone, not just the fieldworker._

Although true of all research, it appeared particularly true of qualitative
research that if it was to retain its academic credibility there had to be rigour to the process surrounding the collection of data. This was because there was not always the ability to check against an ‘absolute’ or ‘proven fact’ that could be claimed by some quantitative research. The researcher working within the framework of mainly qualitative research, had to strike a balance between not allowing prior assumptions to restrict the development of the research, whilst developing research questions and hypotheses that the research could then support or disprove. Inappropriate reliance on assumptions, or a failure to recognise that assumptions were leading a strand of the research enquiry, had to be avoided.

In the context of this research, the importance of professional supervision could also not be under-estimated. Lincoln and Guba (1985:19) offered a helpful checklist of strategies which supported the development of this research. Their recommendation to researchers was that in the effort to increase the credibility of the research, a useful strategy could be:

Peer debriefing; regular meetings with other people who are not involved in the research in order to disclose one’s own blind spots and to discuss working hypotheses and results with them.

The broader Project Manager had a key role to play. Appointed for his project management skills, rather than educational knowledge, the updates on the secondary work stream that were needed in regular meetings, provided opportunities to challenge and seek clarification on any emerging findings from this research. A peer, the broader project lead from the other Education Service also attended those meetings. Their role and that of other mechanisms developed within the research process are further explored in both this chapter and the PDP.

As this research project aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the current secondary SENCo practice in Wales, the evaluation of current research methodologies was helpful to ensure that the researcher confidently applied the methods that would support the collection of data from practitioners within the field that could give a broad evidence base to support the research
questions to fulfil the research aim. Before further outlining the process used, this research undertook a more detailed review of the approaches to research within the field of education in particular. This was to identify what a new researcher could learn from it.

3.5 Choosing the research methodology in the context of educational research

Educational research has an interesting, and not always credible, history so it was helpful to look at past practice to see what a new researcher could learn from it. Phillips and Pugh (2000:54) distinguished between research and what they called ‘intelligence gathering’ illustrating this with replicating ‘what’ questions with ‘why’ questions. They felt that ‘intelligence gathering’ – finding things out - was only an initial stage in developing research practice as ‘what’ questions that relied on factual response, did not go deep enough to help develop understanding of what was being researched. They argued that intelligence gathering may be used in research, but it was clearly unlikely to be enough to develop new knowledge in a field in the way that answering ‘why’ questions might be able to. They suggested that research must seek to explain, analyse and compare what was being studied if it was then going to be able to inform and shape professional practice.

In reality, there are likely to be a number of external factors that would always impact on the development of any research project, its chosen methodology, and the methods employed by the researcher. This was particularly true for a professional doctorate, where the emphasis was on contributing to professional practice within a current economic, political and social context. This research could not be undertaken in a vacuum, there would be factors and forces driving change. Assessment of these forces would be vital as it would help identify not only their source, but their potency to impact on the change process. Being aware of these factors might be helpful to try to avoid the danger of determining the outcome before the research was undertaken. There could be an argument for defining the desired future state to help to set the boundaries for the purpose of the project. There was the potential to
create a framework based on the responses and needs of practitioners; however, this could not become the outcome before the research had begun.

As the proposed research complemented a broader Welsh Government project there was a projected timescale for the setting up, and implementation of, the research project that would prohibit some methodologies being employed. The statutory framework had begun to be put in place, the Legislative Competency Orders (LCOs) – the legal powers for Government to begin to change the law – had been put in place for 2013. The research would need to be completed in the year prior to this if the results were to contribute to statutory reform. Some methodologies, including longitudinal studies or some action research models would take too long to complete. For this research to achieve its objectives, it would have to go beyond describing actions or explaining observations of educational practice or outcomes. Observation and description would not go far enough. The research would need to collect data that could be subject to robust analysis of both qualitative and quantitative responses that could add to the knowledge base for educationalists facing a changing educational landscape.

A commonly employed methodology in educational research is that of ‘action research.’ This is a generic term that covers many forms of action-oriented research. Although discounted as the most appropriate methodology for this research, there was something to learn from its use. Coghlan and Brannick (2005:xii) suggested action research was the most appropriate methodology when the research topic was an unfolding series of actions over time, in a given group. An action research approach would enable the study of actions to change or improve the working of some aspects of the system, and study the process in order to learn from it. They advised:

*Doing action research means being engaged in a more rigorous series of diagnosing situations, planning and taking action and evaluation than is perhaps the norm.*

Action research can be traced back to the work of Kurt Lewin, a social
psychologist who worked in the 1940s. His biographer, Marrow (1969), cited in Coghlan and Brannick (2005:21) clarified his approach:

*Theory often evolved and became refined as the data unfolded, rather than being systematically detailed in advance. Lewin was led by both data and theory, each feeding the other, each guiding the research process.*

Coghlan and Brannick (2005:12) offered broad characteristics that were helpful to define action research, and provided a framework to support the methods employed as part of the action research. Firstly, action research was research *in* action, rather than research *about* action. Secondly, it was a collaborative, democratic partnership concurrent with action. The goal should be to make the action more effective, while building up a body of knowledge that was both valid and able to be forensically evaluated. Their last characteristic was particularly important to support the chosen methods employed for this research. They suggested that action research should be a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving that involves iterative cycles of gathering data, feeding it back to those concerned, analysing the data, planning action, taking action and evaluation, leading to further data gathering. Acknowledging that this model of research required research involving iterative cycles led to the conclusion for this researcher that this was not an approach wholly suited to the research aim. This research was much more focused on evaluating the current practice, and working with educators to determine the current strengths and challenges, in order to identify the factors that impact on the effectiveness of the role of Secondary School SENCo.

Exploring a body of research relating to action research allowed me to identify the benefits of such a methodology. This supported the development of more critical thinking skills in helping to determine the most appropriate research methodology for this research. What I determined was that some of the principles of action research, such as those identified by Carr and Kemmis (1986:165), could be embraced. They identified that there were two essential aims to all action research – to improve and to involve:
Firstly, the improvement of the practice; secondly, the improvement of the understanding of the practice by its practitioners, and thirdly, the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place. The aim of involvement stands shoulder to shoulder with the aim of improvement.

Consequently, although initially this methodology appeared to have an appeal for this research as it was being identified by some as an approach to research that aimed to both take action, and create knowledge or theory about that action, it became clear that there were other methodologies that could also provide a framework that would enable that to be achieved and, importantly, better achieved the research aims within the given time frame. This confirmed for me that the chosen methodology should be case study.

The work of Simons (2009) confirmed that the case study methodology had long been used in educational research as its antecedents lay in sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, law and medicine. Using the previous work of Greene (2000) and Chelimsky (2006), Simons (2009:18) explained the contribution a case study could make:

*Using qualitative methods, it can document participant and stakeholder perspective, engage them in the process, and represent different interests and values in the programme.*

Although a strong advocate of the case study as a research methodology, Yin (2009: 2), believed that each research methodology had peculiar advantages and disadvantages. He suggested that the decision to use the case study depends upon three conditions:

*The type of research question, the control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena. In general, case studies are the preferred method when (a) ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context.*
Yin (2009) confirmed case study as an empirical enquiry, in that you could use case study to understand a real life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding also encompassed important contextual conditions because they were highly pertinent to the phenomenon of study. Yin’s (2009:4) suggestion for the choice of this as the appropriate methodological framework was:

*The more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance the more that the case study method will be relevant....the method is also relevant the more that your questions require an extensive and in depth description of some social phenomenon.*

There were many different definitions of what a case study was. Simons (2009:4) offered a useful framework by clarifying that a ‘case’ could be:

*A person, a classroom, an institution, a programme, a policy, a system.*

Yin (2009: 12) defined case study as:

*A comprehensive research strategy, incorporating specific data collection and analysis approaches to investigate phenomena in real life contexts.*

Gillham (2000:1) concurred that a case could be an individual or it could be an institution, such as a school or a children’s home. He also identified that a ‘case’ was something:

*Which can only be studied or understood in context: Which exists in the here and now: That merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw.*

In the context of this research – that of current professional practice in a climate of national change, this was a particularly useful methodology to
consider as Simons (2009:21) also defined case study as,

*An in depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a real life context. It is research based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence based. The primary purpose is to generate in depth understanding of a specific topic, programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or to inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action.*

In learning from the extensive body of educational research in the form of case studies, a criticism of the case study methodology was that it could often focus on the particularity of a case, and, therefore, make it difficult to make more general inferences. Simons (2009) cited the work of McDonald and Walker, who, as far back as 1975, acknowledged the possible difficulty of yielding insights of universal significance when generalising from a particular case. However, Simons (2009:5) summarised the work of those such as Walker (1974) and Merrian (1988) in suggesting that case study could be a particularly appropriate methodology to use to explore problems in educational practice as:

*Professional practitioners make judgements in concrete circumstances and ‘naturally’ explore ‘instances in action’ i.e. dissemination to audiences beyond the case allows others to learn from it to inform decision-making, policy and practice.*

In the context of this educational research, case study was a useful methodology, particularly as there was no control group – no school could avoid the need to have a response to the statutory framework for this area of work. Simons (2009:14) concluded that this approach was useful as:

*Stakeholders need to know how results were achieved, why some succeeded where others did not, and what the key factors were in the particular setting that led to the precise outcomes. Without such explanation results were inadequate to inform development, policy or practice and were potentially unfair.*
The contribution that the case study approach could make to this type of research was identified by Simons (2009:18) as it offered a:

*Process of conducting systematic inquiry into a phenomenon of choice and generating understanding to contribute to cumulative public knowledge of this topic.*

### 3.6 Choosing the research methods

Once the methodology of case study was confirmed, the next step was to confirm that the chosen methods would best support the research aim. As previously identified, the term ‘method’ is used in this paper to identify the tools that will be used within the chosen methodology. As already identified, I was clear that research in my own professional field had to ensure a transparency and rigour that avoided any potential claims of undue bias. With this knowledge, I decided to build into the research actions that attempted to limit or mitigate against any inappropriate or research bias that invalidated the research process. After carefully consideration, a number of methods were identified.

The work of Gilham (2000:11) confirmed this as it proposed that a case study was one which investigated specific research questions through seeking different kinds of evidence so that it could be collated into the best possible answer to the research question. He suggested that no one kind of source of evidence would be sufficient or sufficiently valid on its own. If using a qualitative approach:

*Qualitative methods focus primarily on the kind of evidence (what people tell you, what they do) that will enable you to understand the meaning of what is going on. Their great strength is that they can illustrate issues and turn up possible explanations: essentially a search for meaning.*
Gillham (2000:13) offered a useful piece of advice in reminding the researcher that different methods had different strengths and weaknesses but that ‘if they converge’, (in that they agree) then ‘reasonable confidence’ could be generated that the reader was getting a true picture. It was at this point that the method of ‘triangulation’ was identified as useful to ensure conclusions were not based on one set of data. Real clarity in the methods used to collect the data was important if I was to produce good quality research.

Yin (2009) did warn against the mistake of proceeding too quickly to data collection. He suggested that time was best spent on developing the five components of the research design – questions, propositions, units of analysis, logic connecting data to preposition and criteria for interpreting the findings. He identified the ‘simple goals’ as having a sufficient blueprint for the study that helped understand why acts, events, structure and thoughts occurred. For this reason, I developed a simple research model to support the research. This is shown in Figure 4.
Define and Design

- Develop the research question and objectives so that a research theory can develop
- Design data collection protocol
- Collect initial data from broader sample
  - Identify cases for further study

Prepare, Collect and Analyse

- Conduct 1st case study
  - Write individual case report
- Conduct 2nd case study
  - Write individual case report
- Conduct any remaining case studies (if they add to the research)
  - Write individual case report

Analyse and Conclude

- Draw cross-case conclusions
- Modify theory
- Develop policy implications
- Write cross-case conclusions

Figure 4 - Case Study research design  (Based on Yin (2009))
Having confirmed the research design, I began to investigate how researchers choose the cases to study. Yin (2009:26) clarified what would appear obvious to the seasoned researcher, but was a useful reminder to the inexperienced. You should choose the case(s) that will most likely illustrate your research questions,

\[\text{A research design is a logical plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Between 'here' and 'there' may be found a number of major steps, including the collection and analysis of relevant data.}\]

He cited Philliber, Schwab and Samsloss (1980) who offered the blueprint for choosing your cases by working through at least four problems – what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyse the results. He clarified that it was the job of the researcher to design the research process that would best address the research question and objectives. Further reflection was needed to ensure that the case settings chosen would achieve the research objectives identified to address the research aim.

Simons (2009) argued that qualitative case study research used three major approaches – observation, interview and document analysis. This provided a useful framework me to reflect on in the chosen methods. With quantitative data analysis a more spatial or statistical approach could be taken, with little subjectivity being used in the analysis. Simons identified the possibility of using either, or both, approaches in educational research. Simons (2009:5) also reflected what a number of authors confirmed in that there was often a case for using a mix of methods. She suggested:

\[\text{It is possible to conduct a case study comprised of quantitative data, or from secondary sources as in a historical case study, and with a mix of methods.}\]

Symonds and Gorard (2010: 127) also suggested that certain types of data were not exclusive to either quantitative or qualitative research:
It may be true that, currently, data from close-ended methods are most often quantified, whereas data from open-ended measures are usually grouped inductively into themes or codes. However, numerical data do not need to be quantified to be used in a study. The answers to a questionnaire for a single case can be examined in narrative analysis to create a portrait of an individual either in one wave or across time without the reporting of any numbers.

The method of questionnaire was well established. Brown and Dowling (1998:66) explored the strengths of the method as being particularly useful for gathering simple information on what people do, have done or might know. They suggested:

_The appeal of the questionnaire is that, once the information required by the researcher has been identified, it appears to be relatively easy to construct a list of questions that get straight to the heart of the matter, to be delivered directly to chosen respondents to complete and return in their own time._

It became clear that the method of using questionnaires could have severe limitations in that the questions needed to ensure that the responses could be standardised, were free from ambiguity in terms of interpretation and bias, albeit unintentional. As questionnaires were beyond the researcher’s control when being completed, the language must be understood, with terms explained for the respondent if the results were to be analysed successfully. What had to be remembered was that, because of the often necessary limited parameters to some case study or ethnographic work, _interpretation_ of research results had to be closely scrutinised. Research of this nature - that attempted to drill down into the realities of the particular case under scrutiny - might find difficulties in then trying to develop models or generalise the outcomes of them into other areas. This did not make it impossible to do, but the results or the evidence of the given case might not always be easily transferable, or able to be simplistically generalised. However, if the case studies were representative of the purpose of the study, I could, potentially, look at the data collected from the case studies and see what more generalised learning points might be identified from them.
The use of interviews was also a well established research method within the case study methodology as they enabled the researcher to explore more complex issues, through developing a more personal engagement in the collection of data. Brown and Dowling (1998) suggested that interviews helped the researcher explore complex issues in more detail, allowing them to probe and to prompt to provide clarification, but they also warned:

*Free form responses to open ended questions can be difficult to analyse and the direct interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee can give rise to forms of interview bias.*

Roulston (2010:115) reminded the researcher that the use of interview was an effective tool in qualitative research, however, it had to be remembered that:

*Qualitative researchers and interviewers are inevitably part of the studies that they conduct, whether or not they make explicit the connection between their subject positions and the ways in which these impact the outcomes of their studies in their reports.*

This reminded me that the development of the skill of reflexivity would make a significant contribution to the execution of this research.

Simons (2009:43) also regarded interviews as a helpful source of case study data:

*Transcripts of interviews offer a basis for later analysis and a spur to further reflection by participants.*

She further proposed that in-depth interviews served at least four purposes. Primarily they could be a means of documenting the interviewee’s perspective, but also they could act as a vehicle to allow active engagement to help both interviewer and interviewee to identify and analyse the issues. Thirdly, an in-depth interview could allow the flexibility to change direction and explore emerging themes as a dialogue was pursued. She identified the final purpose to be that of potentially enabling a greater revelation than
planned, as the interview could uncover and represent feelings and events. Simons (2009:44) concluded:

Unstructured, interpersonal interviews encourages an openness that can lead to unexpected disclosure of issues interviewees would have preferred to keep private.

The skill I needed to develop was the ability to move from purely anecdotal responses, to a framework of evidence based responses, which could be validated by other researchers. This was vital if this evidence base was to be robust in informing national change in policy and practice. As Patton (2002:4) confirmed:

Open ended questions and probes yield in depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge. Data consists of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998:157) offered timely words of warning to the researcher:

One of the most common laments of those who focus on experience in all its messy complexity is that they lose track of the forest for the trees and find it hard to draw closure to a study. There is no easy way to sort this out beyond constantly attending to the researcher’s purpose from beginning to the end of the study.

Thus, effective interviews should be what Burgess (1984:102) identified as ‘conversations with a purpose!’ To be done well, the interviewer must employ a skill set that can facilitate the sharing of information. As already explored, the relationship must benefit from where there is no fear or hierarchical feel to the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer must develop the skill of ‘active listening’ in what Rubin (2004) described as the skill of ‘hearing the meaning’ of what is said. This is a vital skill as the researcher needs to develop the ability to go beyond the words that are said to fully interpret their meaning. This demands that the researcher develop the
sensitivity to read body language, tone of voice and presentation as part of
the skill of understanding what a participant is really trying to say. The
researcher cannot put words into the mouths of their participants, but they
must make sure that they help the respondent communicate the full meaning
of what they want to say.

Having already explored the potential ethical issues within this research this
was confirmation that best practice would suggest that the interviewees
should be asked to give their permission to be tape recorded in the interview
setting so that the researcher could validate the interviews through annotated
transcripts. The need to record such interviews was clearly vital to ensure the
legitimate use of this type of data. The need for the researcher to transcribe
interviews and annotate the results was suggested by many researchers,
such as Merton (1990:135), as the most appropriate method to adopt, so that
there was a greater familiarity developed with the findings and a more
rigorous framework for data collection. The work of Saldana (2009:3) into
using coding in qualitative research was particularly helpful in determining
how the methods would support the achievement of the research aim. He
defined a ‘code as:

\begin{quote}
A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phase
that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence
capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language
based or visual data.
\end{quote}

A code was an abbreviation or symbol that was used to classify the words.
Coding was primarily used to organise and analyse responses. Simons
(2009:117) defined ‘analysis’ as procedures such as coding or concept
mapping that helped the researcher make sense of the data in order to
produce findings and an overall understanding of the case. ‘Interpretation’
was defined as the understanding and insight the researcher could get when
they have a more holistic, intuitive, grasp of the data. She suggested:

\begin{quote}
Interpretation is a highly skilled cognitive and intuitive process.
\end{quote}

What was most helpful for me was that using coding could be seen as a way
to summarise or condense data when the data was in the form of interview
transcripts or documents which would ensure there could not be a claim that I had simply ‘reduced’ the data to suit my arguments. This would facilitate the case study approach being able to be analysed by other researchers. What was also needed was the development of the appropriate skills to interpret the research results. Simons (2009:117) explained:

*Qualitative case study depends heavily on the interpretative skills of the researcher- often personal and intuitive, reflects different experiences and differs widely from one researcher to another.*

I needed to ensure that there were processes embedded in the research process to confirm that the interpretation placed on research evidence was open and transparent for the reader. As the work of Saldana (2009:8) confirmed, using coding could help arrange things in a systematic order and make things part of a system or category. By ensuring how data was grouped it could also consolidate meaning and help explain the data.

### 3.7 The use of documentation.

As already examined, numerous researchers such as Finlay (2002) have identified the importance of being clear on the sources of evidence being used by the researcher in order to support the development of objectivity and academic credibility. For this research, an important and useful source of evidence was documentation and archival records. For some quantifiable measures, such as where the role sat within the management structure of the organisation, how much time they were given to undertake the role and how clear their job description was, it was extremely useful to make reference to documentation. School and Local Authority documentation was identified and requested of the case study schools. In all cases, although not written for a broader audience, it was made accessible to me in the role of researcher.

For this research, the following documentation was identified as useful as it added another perspective, or quantifiable data, to supplement the detailed responses that interviewees had shared:
a) School Structure charts. 
These clarified the position the role held in relation to the broader whole school structure and were used to confirm the evidence provided by the SENCo themselves and their professional colleagues.

b) Estyn reports. 
Reports by the external regulatory body in Wales (Estyn) were used to triangulate the perception of each school on their past performance in relation to the area of SEN.

c) Job descriptions. 
Job descriptions from each case study setting were analysed to confirm the focus of each role discussed in each setting. They also confirmed some specific duties that the post holders identified themselves.

d) Local Authority documentation regarding SEN within each school. 
The schools gave the researcher access to confidential LA evidence from previous SEN reviews that had taken place in their settings. These covered headings such as context and background, areas of strength and weakness and previous recommendations.

e) Pupil performance data. 
Data that analysed the performance of both individual learners with SEN and whole school data was considered as part of the research evidence. This enabled the researcher to confirm any claims each case study setting made into the impact of any changes they had made to the outcomes on performance in this area of work.

The use of confidential school and Local Authority documentation was important to the research, particularly in tracking change, and progress, over time. Although made accessible to me as a researcher, it was important to remember that documentation such as reviews undertaken by Local Authority officers remained confidential to the school and not usually generally accessible outside of the school.

Flick (2009) provided a useful framework to help identify the benefits of asking questions about quality when undertaking research. He proposed that it helped the researcher know how good or bad their own research was, thus
preparing them for the critique of others, whilst secondly, it helped funding institutions evaluate what should, or had been, granted. Thirdly, it helped journal editors decide what should, or should not be published, and, lastly, it helped the interest of other researchers in knowing what research was worth relying on. These are standards that this research process needed to take account of. It was of particular importance to look at the use of any documentation that was to be used in the research process.

As the evidence from the literature review supported the practice of ensuring there was as rigorous as possible an analysis of all the evidence, and as the ethical issues of using the documentation available to the researcher had already been identified, it was important to acknowledge this and clarify the quality assurance processes associated with the use of the documentary evidence. The use of all documentation was covered by the ethics agreement made with participants at the start of the research process. Local Authority and school documentation, although confidential, was used but only after requested from the school and received from them. It was used to confirm the context the school described for itself. Evidence such as ESTYN inspection reports and publically available information from the School Standards Unit was used to support the research by providing another perspective on the impact of changes in the case study schools.

Gillham (2000:20) explained:

*Documents. These can be letters, policy frameworks, regulations, guidelines. They provide a formal framework to which you may have to relate the informal reality.*

As a key source of evidence in the case study settings was expected to be the views of practitioners, school leaders and managers, it was important to the researcher that other documentary sources of evidence could be used to support triangulation of responses.

Interview questions were developed and refined to address the refined research questions to ensure that the factors management and practitioners
identified as important in their expectations for the role could be fully explored. The intention was to ensure that respondents were given the opportunity to develop their responses as fully as possible.

The use of triangulation was well documented as a useful research approach. Miles and Huberman (1984:234) defined this as:

> Checking a new item or test against other, already validated, measures of the same skill construct. If they concur, overlap, correlate strongly – the new item or test has good concurrent validity.

Triangulation to test the data collected was used. This took a variety of forms, for example, asking the same question to both the Head and the SENCo, looking at school documentation, checking if the school described itself in the same terms as external regulators such as Estyn of the School Standards Unit were all used to test the validity of results. They were also useful tools to support quality assurance processes. Denzin (1970, 1989) had long used the method with the aim:

> Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, is a plan of action that will raise sociologists above the personalistic biases that stem from single methodologies. (Cited in Flick 2010, p.42)

What was useful to remember was the advice of Yin (2009: 67). To move the research forward he suggested that the data collection procedures should be:

> …Continuous interaction between the theoretical issues being studied and the data being collected...(so there needs to be ) …sufficient care against potentially biased procedures.

It was important for this research to learn from any issues that had arisen in previous educational research. This was particularly helpful in understanding both the relationship of professional practice to policy development, and the challenges that the research evidence often offered. In their work Carr and
Kemmis (1986:126) explored the relationship between educational theories and educational practice. They concluded that:

The concrete practical experiences of teachers, provides both the subject matter for theoretical enquiry and the testing ground on which the results of this enquiry must be based. Hence it will be acknowledged that ‘theory’ only acquires a ‘scientific’ status when it suggests improved ways of understanding these experiences, and only acquires educational validity when these suggestions are tested and confirmed by practical experience.

Some researchers made clear that one of the characteristics of educational research was that it was not solely a theoretical activity. They suggested that what made it distinctive was that it was, essentially, a practical activity. Gauther, cited in Carr and Kemmis (1986:106) even suggested that educational research does not help if it only brings new knowledge for,

Practical problems are problems about what to do, their solution is only found in doing something.

Carr and Kemmis (1986:76) offered an interesting perspective in that they suggested a relationship between the researcher and the purpose of research:

The scientific educational researcher may not be competent to choose educational goals, he is competent to recommend educational policies that are instrumental to the achievement of whatever educational goals are to be pursued.

An aim of this research was to ensure that it would, from the perspective of educational practitioners, help to develop potential theories to improve educational practice, rather than being an abstract social science research activity. Reflecting on current practice within a knowledge base of current practice would support the achievement of a balance between educational theory and practice.

Undertaking research within the field of education had not always been straightforward, as it could often face difficulties. In relation to this research, Hammersley (2002) offered a timely warning in suggesting that one important
cause of what could often be very unsatisfactory educational research, was that the research had been too preoccupied with producing information that would shape current policy or practice, rather than focusing on what the goals of the research were. This was a particularly significant point for me to note as this research was taking place within the context of a broader Welsh Government timeframe. This research needed to ensure that it was not driven by the statutory timeframe or the need for policy reform. So even though the Welsh Government identified a timeframe to the broad project group, the focus for this research had to continue to be the research question and whether the research was addressing the research aim.

For the work of a professional doctorate, a key principle had to be that the research would impact on professional practice, as much as bring new professional knowledge. The work of Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) proved useful in helping to contextualise the work to be undertaken. Their framework advocated that research needed to engage with both the world of theory and the world of practice. It was the presupposition for me that achieving a balance between these two worlds was crucial if the research practice was to successfully impact on improving professional practice. This was about finding an approach that rested somewhere on what Saunders et al. (2003:4) described as the ‘basic-applied continuum’. They illustrated this in their work. At one extreme of this continuum was fundamental or pure research – where little or no attention was given to practical applications. The other extreme of the continuum was that of research that was direct and immediately relevant to managers, presented in ways they understood and could act upon. The first was unlikely to provide a context for professional change, whilst the latter presented the danger of not providing a context to develop new professional knowledge, which was needed to underpin new professional practice. I determined that if I wanted my research to help contextualise professional change then it had to reject the separation between thinking and action that had characterised much research previously undertaken.

In their work, *Becoming Critical*, Carr and Kemmis (1986:9) advocated that professionals have the right to determine the types of policies, organisation
and procedure that should govern their profession as a whole. They suggested that this contribution was currently underdeveloped:

Teachers operate within hierarchically arranged institutions and the part they play in making decisions about such things as educational policy, the selection and training of new members, accountability procedures and the general structures of the organisations in which they work is negligible.

For this research to successfully engage with the practitioners in this field, there were implications for the relationships that were developed between the researcher, and the teachers and managers engaged with the research. Participants needed to understand that they were helping to shape a change process that may directly impact on their future working practices. The intention of this research was to extend beyond a critical evaluation of the current educational position so that the research had the potential to inform national government regarding changes in the professional field the participants worked in. Knowing the focus of the research was on informing professional practice shaped both the methodology and methods undertaken to use in the research.

3.8 Implementing the research methodology and methods

In determining the best research design within a case study methodology, Figure 5 - The Research Process Timeline (below) was developed to provide a framework for the development of the case study research methods.

It proposed a first stage to the research that gathered as much evidence as possible from all practicing SENCos within the two LAs. This then enabled the identification and development of appropriate case study settings, the data from which would be analysed according to a thematic approach based on the research questions identified to help address the research aim.
### Spring/ Summer 2010 Phase 1
Development and trial of the questionnaire format.

### Autumn 2010 Phase 1
Administration of the questionnaire to all serving SENCos in LA1 (8) and LA2 (20).
Basic analysis of quantitative responses – particularly pay, experience, qualifications and line management structures.

### Spring 2011 Phase 1
Collection of additional questionnaires through individual visits to practitioners.
Analysis of qualitative data provided in the questionnaire responses.
Identification of where further evidence was needed to respond to the research questions and objectives.

### Phase 2
Identification of potential case study schools.
Initial visits for 'scene setting' interviews with Head and practitioners
Collection and analysis of documentary evidence

### Summer 2011- Autumn 2012 Phase 2
Interview schedules for each setting identified
Case study interviews undertaken - Questions developed in relation to research objectives
Further analysis of documentary evidence
Analysis of research data

*Figure 5 - The Research Process Timeline*
An initial questionnaire was determined as the method used as the first phase of this research. This was intended to collect a broad data base from serving SENCos. For the purposes of the Professional Doctorate the writing up the Phase 1 research separately was to make sure that there was an opportunity in the developing research process to check that the process was as credible, and rigorous, as possible. Evaluating Phase 1 enabled me to identify what needed further investigation in the more detailed case study settings. The intention was to write up and present phase 1 of the research, offer critical evaluation of the process at that stage to enable it to inform the next stage of the research.

The separate first phase was a deliberate strategy as many researchers advocated that any initial analysis, phase of research or research report, was the place for ensuring the issue of quality in research. As Luders (1995), cited in Flick (2007:138) explained:

*The research report with its presentation of, and reflection on, the methodological proceedings, with all its narratives about access to and the activities in the field, with its documentation of various materials, with its transcribed observations and conversations, interpretations and theoretical inferences is the only basis for answering the question of the quality of the investigation.*

As an ‘insider researcher’ who knew many of the schools, it was also important to me that any case study settings were chosen on the evaluation of evidence from the research, rather than based on subjective prior knowledge of known local settings. To reduce the potential for misunderstanding in questionnaire results, the strategy implemented in this research was to administer the questionnaire through established practitioner forums, so that the researcher had more control in the supervision and administration of the questionnaire.

By identifying and researching the variables that impact on the effectiveness of secondary SENCos, the research design had to face the challenge of unpicking the relative impact of often inter-related variables, such as experience of the post holder and time allocated to undertake the role. The
effect of the different variable would be hard to unpick. Developing the data from the evidence of the questionnaires, in selected case study settings, would permit the investigation in more detail into the ‘why’ and ‘how’ things took place, rather than simply supporting some conclusions about ‘what’ took place across the secondary sector in the two Local Authorities.

As identified previously, this research was running concurrently to the broader WG pilot project. The support mechanisms available to this research provided by this framework became increasingly important as the research developed as another method to offer support to this research.

The Lead Officers Group (identified to the Welsh Government as the ‘Executive Group’) comprised of the Project Manager and the Lead Officers for the two Local Authorities. Meeting monthly, the progress of this research was reported on regularly. The ability of the other Lead Officer and the Project Officer to scrutinise progress and question methods and actions was invaluable. This element of peer review became increasingly valued by this researcher and supported the decision making process about the direction the research took. All meetings were minuted by the Project Officer with actions agreed prior to the end of the meeting. Any implications for this research were then reflected on and reported back at the next meeting. This was particularly useful in that it helped plan and shape the scheduled Reference Group meetings that were always planned and developed through this mechanism.

A similar opportunity was provided through the Management Board Group. This broader group of statutory and voluntary partners had the primary function of overseeing the process of the broader project although, inevitably, as one of the identified project work streams, this research benefited from their regular scrutiny, at least four times a year. Their interest in the responses to the questionnaires led to interesting discussions on what further evidence was needed to fully address the research aim.

Equally valuable was the support of the Project Reference Group, a range of practitioners from across both the local authorities who met regularly to
shape the work of the broader pilot. Research approaches were proposed to them. Their role as ‘critical friends’ was quickly established. The write up of the research in the next chapter will further identify the role they played however, to summarise, these were people who were undertaking the role, knew from practical experience what the role involved, but had a professional understanding and a grasp of the ‘bigger picture’ that led to them ensuring that if something worked for them, they could articulate why and help propose or analyse what was needed to replicate the results in other contexts.

Another identified group was the Secondary SENCo Forum, a long established network in one Local Authority, one which this researcher had belonged to for many years when undertaking the role of secondary SENCo. They were colleagues who were always quick to share their views and had the credibility of years of practice to challenge any research findings shared with them. This was the forum that also looked at the draft questionnaires and enabled the researcher to refine them to ensure the right balance between the collection of data that both asked for subjective views and collected objective data.

3.8.1 Collecting baseline data through questionnaire

Prior to this project, no research has been undertaken in Wales into the role of SENCo, the duties and responsibilities, or the factors that impacted on the effectiveness of a practitioner being able to undertake the role. This would clearly make it difficult for the Welsh Government to suggest potential changes to the role, or have a mechanism for evaluating the impact of such changes.

As the research aim had led to the development of the research objectives, this part of the research process aimed to address objectives two to four:

2) To identify and investigate variables that impact on SENCo effectiveness in the secondary school setting.
3) To investigate perceptions of the effectiveness of the secondary SENCo from the perspective of current post holders and school leaders and managers

4) To investigate and identify the current facilitators and challenges in successfully undertaking the role of SENCo identified by the current post holders.

The first phase of the research process needed to help establish baselines in relation to the practice for post holders, variables that impacted on their working, and factors that they perceived might impact on their ability to undertake the role. This objective was primarily addressed through a questionnaire sent to all secondary SENCo practitioners in both Local Authorities. There were 223 State secondary Schools in Wales. As the research base for this project was across 28 secondary schools, this sample gave access to over one tenth of the current practitioners in Wales. The most efficient data collection mechanism for Phase 1 of the research was to undertake an initial questionnaire of those in post within the 28 secondary schools within the two Local Authorities. All responses were kept with responses collated into one master copy.

Once this phase was completed, it gave me a natural point to evaluate the progress of the research, something of particular use for this mainly qualitative research in a field of practitioners mainly known to me. This review of progress against the research question and objectives enabled me to formulate some research findings that could be open to external scrutiny, shared and confirmed with the practitioner groups, before the research moved on to more in depth exploration of some of the objectives.

Learning from the literature review of previous research based on questionnaires, it became clear that being able to ask the right questions was fundamental to the first stage of this research, and the collection of good quality baseline data. The questionnaires, discussed in more detail below, could not just rely on the anecdotal or subjective experiences of practitioners in the field, they were clearly framed to address the research objectives. The questionnaire approach provided the opportunity to collect some quantitative
data that had not been gathered before across the sector and enabled the respondents to offer information pertinent to the research objectives.

Developing this aspect of the data collection identified a number of issues that I needed to address. These related to the range of data I wanted to collect. The simplest approach was to collect quantifiable data, relating to the ‘what’ of the job, but it soon proved that this was not going to be sufficient if the research was going to develop into the ‘why’ things were or ‘how’ they took place. Better quality data could be collected if there was a broader question base. As Patton (2002:5) explained:

At the simplest level, a questionnaire or interview that asks both fixed choice (closed) questions and open ended questions is an example of how quantitative measurement and qualitative inquiry often combine.

Identifying the questions for the questionnaire was not straightforward. It was a learning experience for me as a researcher. It was easy to ask the respondent to relay facts concerning their post, such as how long they had been in role or what additional qualifications they had. Agreeing with the research work of Cole (2005), one researcher in the field in England, the areas that needed to be initially developed appeared straightforward. Factual information such as the age of the practitioner, the phase they operated in, their gender, years teaching experience and qualifications all appeared useful to contextualise the national picture. However, beginning to identify the status given to the role and exploring differences in practice concerning strategic and operational responsibilities were far more difficult to structure. These key issues were likely to be crucial to the quality of the research evidence so further consideration had to be given to ensuring the questionnaire was going to ensure the collection of useful data in these areas. This also had to be seen within the context of each unique secondary school setting, teaching and line management commitments, and senior management support structures. A ‘one size fits all’ questionnaire would not address the aim. There had to be sufficient flexibility in each question to enable the respondent to personalise their response to their setting, whilst
also providing data that could be compared with the responses of other respondents.

3.8.2 Developing and piloting the questionnaire

Developing the most appropriate questionnaire was an interesting and iterative process, which resulted in a number of proformae being created.

As the broader project of developing the potential role of ALNCo across all mainstream school settings in Wales was developing simultaneously with this research, it was suggested at the broader project executive group meeting that a generic questionnaire - Appendix D - could be used with schools at all educational phases. The Project Manager was charged with the collection of baseline data from the primary SENCoS for the broader WG pilot. Consequently, both the Project Manager and I administered the questionnaires to both the primary and secondary SENCo cohorts. I was responsible for identifying the aspects of data to collect.

When trialled at the next scheduled Reference Group meeting, three serving secondary school SENCoS and three Local Authority officers who supported mainstream practitioners were able to critically evaluate this data collection framework. Representing individual settings across the two Local Authorities, it became clear that secondary colleagues found significant difficulty in identifying their teaching commitment within the framework of the proforma used. Their interpretation of the questions led to insecure or inconsistent data in their responses. Many offered data that, upon calculation of percentage of time used, totalled more than 100 per cent - clearly a difficulty for the research findings.

When trying to complete the broader pilot questionnaires, there was also a noticeably greater difference between the responses from secondary SENCoS and their primary colleagues regarding basic quantitative questions, such as amount of non contact time available to undertake duties assigned. The risk that this would lead the researcher to misrepresent secondary practitioner responses had to be addressed. For example, the initial
questions were framed based on a presumption that all lessons in the secondary sector were of the same duration and all SENCo, had a standard allocation of non contact time. Through talking to practitioners this was clearly articulated as not being the case.

Working through the development of the questionnaire as a tool to collect the research information with practitioners, provided the opportunity to be able to collect more accurate evidence. The most effective questionnaire would enable the research questions to be more fully explored, rather than become solely an activity of practitioner personal reflection that might then be open to misinterpretation. If the questionnaires were to support the research question, and clearly address the primary aim of the research, they would also support the further development of the research into a more in-depth case study approach in a few settings. The potential of this mixed method developing into more detailed case studies was that there could then be a more thorough investigation of the current status of the SENCo role in the secondary school setting, and a clearer identification of the factors that impact on the effectiveness of that role to a potentially greater level of detail than could be achieved solely through a questionnaire.

The main research questions that the questionnaire intended to address were:

- What are the expectations on the role of SENCo in the secondary sector?
- Is the role clear particularly in relation to the balance of the role as leader and manager in a setting?
- How do practitioners measure their own professional effectiveness?
- How do head teachers and school leaders measure the effectiveness of the SENCo role?

As the questionnaire was refined and developed, reference to the research objectives and research questions ensured that there were an appropriate range of questions within it to generate research data to address the objectives needed to achieve the overall research aim. The questions within the questionnaire began to fall into four main themes which comprised of:
• the context of the secondary schools being researched,
• the status of those holding current roles in the field,
• the current experience and qualifications within the workforce,
• and the extent of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the time allocated to undertake their duties.

The generic questionnaire (Appendix D) that had been developed for the broader pilot was trialled. The lesson learned was that it became clear that a number of responses were more accurate when they related to quantifiable or objective data such as length of service, renumerations for the role or teaching time. However, a significant amount of the data was going to rely on the subjective judgment of the respondent, for example, the time spent on administration of duties. Some of these initial questions proved to be too broad as responses could not be compared with other settings, based on the information supplied. This was mainly in relation to the context the SENCo was working in. This would not permit accurate analysis of the findings, and needed further development.

Therefore, after a trial of the questionnaire in Appendix D, a difficulty with the data provided was discovered. It became clear that there needed to be a questionnaire that was written specifically for secondary school practitioners. The secondary school context for the role and work of the SENCo was so different to the structures that primary SENCos operate in. For example, in the majority of primary schools, practitioners could compare the same time allocation, the statutory contact time of 23 hours a week, whereas each secondary school operated a different approach to timetabling for example, some operated a timetable of 50 lesson a fortnight, others had more lessons of 40 minute each and some SENCos wrote their own timetables to meet individual learners separate to operation of the timetable across the rest of the school.

For this reason the questionnaire in Appendix E was created by me specifically for this research, based on a balance of questions that asked for qualitative judgements and questions that asked for quantifiable responses. Although the themes remained the same, the format of the questionnaire
gave more prompts to the nature of the question and grouped the questions more thematically for ease of completion. This aimed to make some questions a little more open, so that the individual context of schools could be reflected, along with collection of some of the objective data such as how many years in post, or professional qualifications the SENCo held.

The Secondary SENCo Forum was used to test the second questionnaire. This attempted to identify the many roles that the duties covered in individual settings, and began to ask colleagues what the role involved relative to other roles within their school. The participants in the forum were motivated to ensure that any questionnaire they helped trial provided all colleagues with the opportunity to capture the full remit of the role they represented.

Whilst practitioners felt that the questionnaire in Appendix E was clearer than the first questionnaire, they reflected that it would still cause confusion amongst colleagues as to what some questions were expecting in terms of responses. They felt particularly that the questionnaire did not go far enough in unpicking how the serving SENCo spent their time – and still relied on a presumption that all colleagues were undertaking the same range of duties in all secondary school settings. They advocated that more open questions would facilitate better data collection. They also advised that better quality responses would be obtained if colleagues were talked through the questionnaire, for example, in their next scheduled professional networking forums.

Having reflected on their feedback, the questionnaire framework in Appendix F was constructed in order to create more open ended questions, with the aim of improving the quality of responses. For me, the analysis of this type of research data offered greater richness of data, as it encouraged respondents to give more detailed and personalised responses. The questionnaire format in Appendix F became the data collection format for the initial questionnaire.

Using the next available professional secondary SENCo forum available in early November 2010, I was able to explain the purpose of the questionnaire, share the information about the research, obtain the consent of participants
and ensure their understanding of the baseline questions. Even though some of the participants had seen previous drafts of the questionnaire no-one had actually completed it before. The reason for the choice of the two Local Authorities was clarified and the ethics of the difference between my professional role and my role as a researcher was explained. This provided the opportunity to reassure participants that this was an anonymous collection of baseline data about the role they were currently undertaking and allay any fears that their perceptions of their role would be cited, or reported back, to the managers within their own settings. The learning from the literature review was a considerable support in ensuring that there was an opportunity to hear any feelings or concerns that they wanted to raise.

Although another similar forum was set up in late November 2010 the bad weather necessitated the cancellation of the full meeting, so colleagues had the questionnaire explained to them though letter and phone contact. The response rate from these arrangements was 16 out of 20 returns within the first Local Authority and five out of eight from within the second LA. As the 28 schools represent over one tenth of the secondary schools in Wales, I was keen to represent the views of all practitioners through providing as many opportunities as possible to achieve 100 per cent returns.

Later in the spring term those schools which had not returned their responses were scheduled for a visit from me to support the completion of the data collection questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed in the same way as their peers, but also gave them the opportunity to confirm and question how the data collected would be used. Once there was the clarity their peers had received regarding confidentiality and the use of data, colleagues were keen to sign the consent forms and extend their answers, giving far more detail than those who had submitted a questionnaire completed in the SENCo forums. No one undertook the questionnaire without first having a clear explanation of the research protocols. This was done by phone, in a forum meeting or before the individual session.

To ensure that I treated the data in the same way as all other responses I annotated a blank questionnaire proforma as the participants were
completing the questionnaires. If they made any comment, or asked for further clarification, I noted it on my copy and subsequently filed them away with the participant responses. This particularly helped highlight the difference in the quality of research responses when I explained the questions to the respondents in person. For example, one participant read the question relating to renumeration for the role (question 2) and corrected herself as she read the question out loud. Some respondents preferred to talk to me rather than solely note their responses on the questionnaire. To avoid bias in the recording of such responses I had to ensure that although the respondents could be reassured that this was acceptable, there had to be rigour in ensuring that responses were noted verbatim, rather than ‘interpreted’ in any way.

The final result of Phase 1 data collection was 100 per cent return from all schools, although one participant only reported the factual data on her role and did not want to answer any of the questions that developed her personal views while another respondent also gave only partial answers to some questions. The quality of these responses varied from those of the others but did give a total of 28 responses. Due to the two incomplete set of answers, not all responses to all questions could be used in comparative data analysis across the 28 schools. Consequently, answers were only used in the overall analysis of the data set on a question by question basis. The next chapter will analyse the research findings from this baseline data collection research activity.

3.9 Developing the research into case studies

To mitigate against inappropriate bias in the process of the research, opportunities needed to be taken to test the degree to which I was open to contrary findings or alternative findings. It was decided to report preliminary findings from the questionnaires to both the Reference Group and the Secondary SENCo Forum - those small groups of critical friends/colleagues - who would be encouraged to make suggestions or challenges to the emerging issues. This was done by sharing the summary of results from the 28 respondents early in the Summer Term of 2011. Although some of the
groups had been research participants, no individual responses were shared and only the summary data in appendix G was used. Responses were sufficiently generalised to ensure anonymity was protected.

Although they presumed the detail of the role would be contextualised to each secondary setting, overall, they expressed surprise at the variance in practitioner responses across the sector. They confirmed the level of concern that the role of SENCo was not seen to be an attractive career option and articulated that they recognised the tension in the strongly emerging theme that there was no clarity between the role as manager and the role of practitioner. They raised another interesting issue that was summed up by one colleague:

\textit{There is now a tension in school between supporting a commitment to inclusion and meeting the Government requirement to continually raise academic standards.}

The responses in the questionnaires provided an important insight into the interpretation of the Code of Practice regulatory framework that was currently being implemented in the schools in the research sample. An area that was emerging that needed to be further explored in the case study schools related to the balance of the role as a manager, and how that related to leadership demands within this area of work.

The evidence from Phase one initial conclusions identified areas that needed further examination. There was a need for more focused questions on the perception of how practitioners spend their time, the nature of duties they regularly undertook and the expectations on the role from senior managers and head teachers. There was also a need to investigate how the role was strategically managed, and developed, to identify potential implications for the statutory changes. This might have significant implications on the professional development activities that would be needed to support those changes, and would be part of the next phase of the research.

From the baseline findings and from their discussions, there was also a need to further explore what type of additional continuing professional
development (CPD) was required to support the development of this key role in schools. The post was increasingly being expected to manage and deploy significant teaching and non-teaching staff. There appeared to be little focus in most settings on evaluating the impact of school provisions on learner outcomes.

One of the drivers for the broader pilot project, that the role needed a mandatory additional post graduate qualification, still appeared too general a presumption to make. Unless the content of that qualification in relation to those duties undertaken, and responsibilities already held by current post holders was explored, any qualification may prove ineffective in terms of impact on the effectiveness of the role. Any mandatory qualification would need to be fit for purpose, but without further agreement on what the purpose of this key role was, this would prove difficult for the Welsh Government.

What also became clear through Phase one was that practitioners in the field were the people who could contribute to the development of an understanding of what national change was needed. Their responses showed that they knew what they were doing, knew how much they were doing and all had an idea of what they would want to be doing in the role.

Phase 2 of the research was informed by the questionnaire analysis in Phase 1, as discussed above. Key themes for further investigation in the case study schools were identified as:

- The main responsibilities undertaken by those in the role
- The skills and competencies needed to undertake the role effectively
- How the role was led and managed – particularly how it was evaluated for effectiveness and
- How SEN and ALN was led and managed at a whole school level

Having evaluated the data in the Phase one research, and established the key issues, there was a need to finally identify a cross section of respondents, in secondary school settings, to follow up as more focused case studies. This was to further identify, and analyse, the factors that
impact on the effectiveness of the secondary school SENCo. Within these schools it was the intention to separately interview the post holder, the head teacher and any other relevant officer so that results could be triangulated.

In administering the questionnaires it began to emerge that there was a number of the schools in the study who were undergoing times of significant change. Respondents referred to ‘at the moment… but from next term…’ or ‘the new head wants me to…’. In collecting this data from the questionnaires, it was noted that a number of secondary schools across the research sample were experiencing times of significant change in their institution. These were changes where there appeared to be an immediate focus on this area of work from those setting the strategic direction for the school. The responses given in these settings identified changes to the role in relation to the ways in which direction from the leadership and management of the school was changing. This would provide a research context to further develop lines of enquiry into the role of SENCo, at a time when the school was particularly focusing on this aspect of their provision and practice. I decided that more could be learned in settings where there was recent, and significant, change in school senior management or structure when the focus was on looking at SEN as a whole school issue.

Being able to research using school leaders and managers, documentation written by Local Authority personnel to identify the stimulus and nature of the change, and then evaluate the impact of the changes made, was expected to prove useful in identifying the variables that influence and impact on positive outcomes. Triangulating using a variety of sources of evidence was seen as being important in enabling there to be a rigorous examination of how the settings had developed, that did not wholly depend on the view of the school personnel.

Thus, the evidence of recent and relevant strategic change in the management of SEN provision defined as a change of head teacher with a focus on whole school SEN provision within the last academic year became the criteria for the identification of the case study schools.
3.10 Selecting the case study schools

When undertaking the literature review, the learning from other research suggested that there were a number of factors that impacted on deciding whether to undertake a single case or multiple case study approach. In evaluating the written responses from the questionnaires in Phase 1, it became clear that, according to the research criteria of recent and relevant strategic change, there were three schools that could be identified as individual case studies, which could be viewed within a multiple case design. As Yin (2009:53) explained:

> Single and multiple-case designs to be variants within the same methodological framework – and no broad distinction is made between the so-called classic (that is, single) case study and multiple case design. The choice is considered one of research design, with both being included under the case study method.

These were identified by the participant as schools where the line management of the area of work was the subject of a recent or ongoing review. Evidence can often be considered more compelling from multiple case studies, but this should not be taken as fact. Yin explained (2009:54):

> The logic underlying the use of multiple cases is the same. Each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results for anticipatable reasons (a theoretical replication)

Yin (2009:55) continued to explain that an important step in all these replication procedures was the development of a rich theoretical framework. The framework needed to state the conditions under which a particular phenomenon was likely to be found (literal) as well as the conditions when it was not likely to be found (theoretical). To inform change at a national level, the development of a theoretical framework would later need to become the vehicle for enabling policy makers to make links to other secondary settings. Yin (2009: 59) summarised:
The simplest multiple-case design would be the selection of two or more cases that are believed to be literal replications, such as a set of cases with exemplary outcomes in relation to some evaluation questions, such as ‘how and why a particular intervention has been implemented smoothly’ Selecting such cases requires prior knowledge of the outcomes, with the multiple-case inquiry focusing on how and why the exemplary outcomes might have occurred and hoping for literal (or direct) replications of these conditions from case to case.

As the evidence from the case studies was mainly of a qualitative nature, I had to be clear and remember that you cannot simply generalise up when using a case study methodology. Unlike an experiment in a laboratory, a case study does not represent a ‘sample’. In doing a case study, the goal had to be to expand and generalise theories being developed rather than simply count the frequency of something.

3.11 Developing the case study interview process

With a small number of cases in the study I knew there was a real danger that generalisations would be extrapolated from the research data that could not be genuinely substantiated. The rule became the need to be sure that, if a later investigator followed the same procedures as described by them, and conducted the same case study all over again, the later investigator could reasonably arrive at the same findings and conclusions. At least if the exact circumstances could not be replicated, they could confirm through the research that the findings and data were representative of valid research.

I developed case study interview questions (Appendix H for School Leaders and Appendix I for serving SENCos), based on the refined research questions developed after phase 1. I then went into the two case study settings and undertook the first interviews with school leaders and SENCos. I had not chosen to undertake a pilot case study interview which, on reflection was something that a novice researcher might have benefitted from. Although the interviews were conducted ethically and rigorously, being audio recorded, with the subject’s full consent, the reality was that I was in danger of using the methodology to confirm what they thought they already knew, rather than as a research method to further explore the developing research
theory. On reflection, the first interview felt more like they were asking staff to confirm something already known, rather than a genuine attempt to collect research evidence. For example, the annotated notes about the first interview contained in the PDP folders identified:

‘I asked question 1 and didn’t give respondent 1 sufficient time to respond. It appears I wanted to avoid silence so began to reframe the question before they had sufficient time to form their answer. To avoid this I need to:

- Ask the question clearly and with confidence
-Pause to allow the respondent thinking time
-Repeat the question (if necessary) rather than rephrase it
-Allow them to tell me if they don’t understand the question or need further clarification.’

Rather than dismiss the evidence collected, I safely filed and stored the evidence, and determined to spend more time developing the appropriate approaches and explanations before returning to the field. This was done by returning to the initial data collected through the questionnaires and relating the findings to the original research questions. Each question was analysed as to what evidence it provided, which then enabled the researcher to spend more time on developing the areas that needed further data. The questions needed to further support enquiry into the refined questions that could then be developed for the case study interviews. More time was spent on requesting and scrutinising documentation.

Taking advice from researchers such as Rubin and Rubin (2004) I endeavoured to ensure interviews became ‘guided conversations rather than structured questions’ as they identified:

...your actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid, rather than rigid.

Deciding whether I was going to do interviews that would take the form of in depth interviews that allowed participants to explore wide ranging and less structured areas of questioning, or more focused interviews that allowed the researcher to focus on in key aspects to address through the interview needed to be developed. Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) suggested that a focused one hour interview was appropriate for a busy professional being
interviewed in their professional setting. It was a manageable amount of time for the professional to be out of circulation, but sufficient time to corroborate facts, do further probing and maintain some open ended questions. For this reason, I adopted this interview approach.

From the literature review it became clear that I had to be a good listener. Adaptable and flexible questioning would help to ensure that new opportunities that arose through interviewing were not seen as a threat to the results of the research. The skill was to start to explore the research proposition without letting it become a straightjacket or pre-conceived notion that could bias the research. I developed Figure 6 as a guide to shape the cycle of questioning in the interview context.

Figure 6 - The process for developing questioning in the case studies.
The work of Becker (1998: Chapter 1) was helpful in describing the ‘tricks of the trade’ for the new researcher. His work proposed that within case study interviews there are often questions operating at two levels. Your actual questions may be those you pose for that interviewee, however, the more open questions may be serving the broader need of a whole line of enquiry. In an actual interview situation he cautioned that posing a ‘why’ question may provoke defensiveness from the interviewee, so suggested the development of ‘how’ questions – ‘how do you think...’ to replace ‘why does... happen..?’ in the actual interview. Thus questions became:

- How do you measure your effectiveness in your job? (SENCo interview question 2)
- In this school, what do you believe the staff understand the role to be? (School Leader interview question 3)

The broader WG pilot Project Officer was also invaluable in testing the research findings as the research developed. With no understanding of the context of this field of education (his background was in finance), he was a helpful check of whether identified issues and themes were generated from the evidence base or inferred, because of my professional involvement in the field. Tutorials undertaken with my academic supervisor also provided an opportunity to explain how and what was helping to develop the research model.

The monthly meetings of the Executive group became a genuine and valuable opportunity to test developing research findings. A regular slot was placed on the agenda, with the researcher expected to present an update of how the research was progressing, and what issues and challenges were being encountered. As the unfolding research findings were gathered, they were presented in draft where the officers scrutinised, and often challenged, how they were being presented, and, more importantly, how they were, or could be, interpreted.

An example of this was after the first of the case study interviews in School X took place, where the head and the SENCo had asked to be interviewed
together, part of an Executive group meeting was spent allowing the researcher to explain her concerns regarding the first interview being undertaken by the two participants together. A discussion took place on whether this had significantly impacted on the quality of the research data. The transcripts were scrutinised. As the participants enjoyed a positive relationship the conclusion was that the data was valid however, it was better to ensure that, in future, all interviews were undertaken with individuals. Not only did opportunities like this provide a professional dialogue for me but provided support in ensuring the rigorous timeframe for the research was adhered to.

Using the small professional Reference Group accessed through a regular input I gave in the broader WG pilot project meetings, time was spent on doing further work to develop the skill of devising clear, unambiguous questions. This was done by presenting them with the draft questions. They identified that the more ‘open’ the question was, the greater the opportunity was to encourage richer dialogue that would provide an opportunity for a better grasp of the issues being explored. Although this appears fairly obvious, the differences in their individual settings did also lead them to identify that making sure head teachers and senior managers were made to confirm their understanding of key concepts and terms (such as outcomes for SEN learners and ALN) would be vital if there was to be a greater understanding of the current role and how it was being undertaken.

3.12 Research approach - conclusions

The introduction explored the importance of the concept of reflexivity, particularly when research was being undertaken in your own field. The advantage of a professional doctorate was that it had a modular structure built in which facilitated and encouraged natural points for reflection. It is important to explain that this post graduate work did not proceed in a linear way along a set time line. The literature review was not a ‘section’ that had an end point. The learning was on a continuum and all parts of the research process were continually informed by more recent and relevant reading as it took place.
Along with the mechanisms built into the research as it took place to avoid ‘insider’ bias a range of opportunities to reflect on the work as it developed ensured that the research continued to address the research aim, and that I stayed true to the purpose of the research. These aspects of the modular approach within the professional doctorate were documented in the Professional Development Portfolio (PDP), a growing collection of lever arch folders that maintained all the minutes of all meetings that supported the research, as well as all the personal reflections noted during the course of the research. The PDP following this thesis also illustrated the learning from this reflective practice.

As the investigation into the case study methodology identified, although there may be some potential weaknesses in the personal involvement of the researcher when researching in their own field, Simons (2009:162) clarified that subjectivity need not be a negative for;

Subjectivity is not something we can avoid whatever methods we adopt, though it is more visible in qualitative inquiry.

Taking advice from researchers such as Denzin (1989) I determined to:

Acknowledge its inherent subjectivity and concentrate on demonstrating how your values, predispositions and feelings impact upon the research. This is different from saying we can eliminate them.

(cited in Simons (2009:164))

The work of Miles and Huberman (1994:252) made clear that qualitative research had a clear place in academic research but that quality assurance processes, particularly involving human subjects, must make sure there was rigour to the work. They concluded that anyone who wanted to contribute to the development of qualitative analysis ‘owed it to colleagues’ to share and communicate what they had learned with other researchers. They confirmed that their hope was that qualitative researchers would increasingly tell others ‘concretely and specifically just how they went about it.’ That, above all, was the primary intention of this research.
Ensuring I was operating in as tight an ethical framework as possible made sure that my focus was on doing research that could contribute to the body of professional knowledge in my field within Wales. If, as Flick (2007:123) suggested:

*The intervention of research in a field and the disturbances it brings with it are only justified if it is done for good, reliable and trustworthy research that is as likely as possible to produce credible results.*

Then it was the intention of this research that the results would make a significant contribution to shaping the future direction of professional practice in Wales. In relation to supporting vulnerable learners in mainstream secondary schools in Wales, this research aimed to give a robust evidence base to support changes in legislation. This, however, could not be allowed to shape the direction of the research findings. This was primarily focused on identifying what we could learn from current practice to ultimately improve the quality of professional support practitioners received.

Having researched the literature to understand the context of this research and confirmed the methodology to adopt to successfully address the research aim, the next step was to finish undertaking and then write up the research, the results of which are outlined in the following chapter.
Chapter 4. Reporting the results

Although the research approach identified 2 distinct phases to data collection, the research was viewed holistically as it continually revisited the research aim to investigate the current situation in the secondary school setting through the exploration of the perceptions of practitioners *in situ*. It is, however, helpful to report the first phase separately so that there is clarity on how further evidence was gathered in the case study settings.

4.1 Analysis from the questionnaire data

Having such a positive response rate from respondents keen to share their information provided a rich source of data. Analysis of the responses identified that, within the sample of 28 schools, a number of baseline features could be identified, compared and analysed. The profile of age and qualifications of serving practitioners, their qualifications and time allocated to duties were all aspects that drew objective responses to questions that had not been misinterpreted. That ensured that the data was robust and could be analysed and evaluated.

I created a data collection sheet - Appendix G - that supported the direct comparison of all 28 responses to each individual question. Using this method ensured that even though two respondents had not answered all the questions, their responses to many of the questions were still valid and could be used in the analysis of responses. The questions that were quantifiable, such as years in post, were then able to be analysed so that percentage responses could be calculated. My intention was to provide a format that was open to scrutiny by peer researchers.

The results were categorised into the following broad thematic headings:

1. Basic data – title, pay, experience, qualification
2. Place of the role in the 28 settings – line management, place in school structure
3. Perceptions of the current postholders – status, duties, responsibilities
4.1.1 Basic data – title, pay, experience, qualification

Even within the collection of the most basic data there was variation. The questionnaire had clearly explained that they were being asked about the role and duties of the Secondary SENCo. When asked the first question, ‘What is the title given to the role that leads on this area of work in your school?’ across the 28 schools, nine different titles were identified as being used to lead this area of work. The results are represented in Figure 7 (below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>NUMBER /PERCENTAGE</th>
<th>Number of respondents who were named SENCo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Inclusion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 also had another identified SENCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>2 were the named SENCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1 was not a teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENCo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Manager</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 also had another identified SENCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>2 were the named SENCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALNCo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Academic Inclusion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of ALN</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Supportive Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Learning Support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AENCo</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 – Titles in use across the schools in the sample.
Although SENCo still remained the most common title in operation in ten out of the 28 schools, this only represented 35.7 per cent, or about one third, of titles used across both the Local Authorities. In one LA most schools used the second most popular title Additional Educational Needs Co-ordinator (AENCo), this was five out of their eight secondary schools. However, the participants identified that this role covered exactly the same duties and responsibilities as the role of SENCo as identified in the Code of Practice. A number of schools used the term Inclusion Manager or Head of Inclusion to identify the lead role, but then in almost half the cases supplemented this with someone else likely to be supporting the actual SENCo duties as identified in the Code of Practice.

This appeared significant as it reflected a lack of clarity as to the purpose and remit of the role, particularly as some practitioners suggested that head teachers thought ‘ALN’ and ‘SEN’ were interchangeable responsibilities. This was identified as something to explore further when developing interviews in the case study settings to identify the significance in the terminology, or titles, in this area of work.

The responses to the question relating to pay allocated to the role varied greatly. Five practitioners were paid on the Leadership pay spine. This was 17.8 per cent of the 28 schools. The majority, 74.9 per cent, were paid a Teaching and Learning Responsibility point (TLR), although many did not know how their post related to other roles within their settings. One respondent was not paid as a teacher, with one only receiving the mandatory SEN points that were usually allocated for direct teaching of learners with SEN.

There were a number of issues raised by this data. It might reflect that schools and Governing Bodies were confused as to where the role should sit in the structure – being unclear as to whether it was a whole school leadership role, or whether it was a departmental head management role. What was clear from the returns was that there was a lack of understanding of where the role sat strategically in the perceptions of the post holders themselves. Although financial remuneration for a job could not be identified
as the sole factor in determining the importance of a post, it was clear that there needed to be a further examination on where the role sat, to determine whether this was a significant factor in influencing the effectiveness of the role. It also confirmed what the research evidence in England suggested. As Hallett and Hallett (2010:13) identified:

\[\text{SENCo has little time to consider the strategic nature of the role...it is clear in practice that the role is changing.}\]

Questions 3 and 4 were in reference to length of both teaching experience generally and experience in working in this area of work. One respondent did not give data for these questions.

**Figure 8**
*Years teaching experience of serving SENCos in the sample schools (Q3)*

**Figure 9**
*Years holding SEN responsibilities for serving SENCos in the sample schools (Q4)*
A significant factor for both the broader national project, and for this research, was whether practitioners were interested in being recruited into the role, and whether they had the experience or qualification to undertake the duties. ‘SENCo’ as a role is not one you can be trained for through Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITT). It is one where people tend to develop an interest, and then undertake additional training whilst in situ. Those in post who had been teaching less than five years would be seen to be relatively inexperienced practitioners. As the mandatory framework in England had changed in September 2009 to make a qualification compulsory for practitioners in post up to a year, it was important to identify what that might mean in Wales if a similar regulation were applied. Many of the participants in the SENCo Forum Group suggested that up to three years in role would be a useful guide for who would need a training programme. That figure inevitably identified a greater number of practitioners who, potentially, might need such professional development.

Of the 27 respondents that provided data, 55.5 per cent had over twenty years teaching experience, another 29.6% had over ten years teaching experience. Only 7.4 per cent had been teaching less than five years. Presuming that the usual maximum teaching career was forty years – with most practitioners retiring early, this would indicate that the majority of practitioners were nearer the end of their careers. When asked about length of experience in SEN, the responses varied from less than a year to over 33 years. The majority would not meet the criteria in England for needing to undertake the mandatory SENCo training as 22.2 per cent of practitioners, six out of the 28, had been in role a year or less. The same amount, 22.2 per cent had been in post between one and three years – and may be a better indicator as to the need for professional development across Wales. However, the nature of the training required for SENCos needed to be explored, so was investigated further in the case study schools.

There was a danger, as in some of the research findings in England that a presumption might be made that length of service in the post equated to the amount of training needed. This was not necessarily the case. Although direct contact in the role might bring valuable experience to the practitioner, it
may not be the best indicator of the need for mandatory training in how to be a SENCo unless the nature of the training needs were further investigated with practitioners. Mandatory training could potentially provide the opportunity to develop a minimum knowledge base, but could never be used to then make a direct correlation with excellence in practice. Training might provide a framework for quality assurance processes for national government, but could never claim to directly result in practice on the ground being improved.

Although there might be inaccuracies in simply using this sample to extrapolate up to a national level, the sample was representative of the sector across Wales in relation to the range of schools involved across faith, language and demographic profiles. This was confirmed by the references to the All Wales Core Data sets providing the data on families of schools. Thus, if these results were replicated across Wales, it indicated that just over one fifth of serving SENCos would need to complete statutory training in the role and responsibilities as they would be identified as ‘new to post’.

Even though this was not a direct conclusion that could be made from the research evidence, it was an indication of the scale of the need that could potentially be identified. This required further investigation and would be significant in relation to national policy and planning development. As the two Local Authorities were predominantly urban and inner city conurbations, there was no representation in the sample from any rural Welsh secondary schools.

The English Department for Schools and Education (DfES) had legislated that only those in post up to a year needed to undertake additional qualifications in the field, although informal responses across Wales via the national ADEW conference in March 2010 indicated a belief that practitioners believed this should be broadened.

As the WG was seeking to develop to offer a mandatory additional qualification in this area of work, the responses to question five were noteworthy. Two thirds of serving practitioners within the sample had an additional qualification in relation to SEN or leadership and management.
This was either at Masters or post graduate diploma level. Many were qualified in aspects of provision such as autism or dyslexia. Only four participants identified that they had covered aspects of leadership and management in relation to the management of SEN in the secondary school setting. This had been undertaken as part of their Masters level qualifications. One practitioner had been part of the trial SENCo qualification in England, although there was no data on the impact of the mandatory professional development programme in England. Just over one third, 34.6% had no additional post graduate qualification.

4.1.2 Place of the current role in 28 settings – line management, place in school structure

Question 6 explored the current place of the role within management systems, asking whether the post holder was on the senior management team (SMT) for their identified responsibilities in SEN. Just over 20 per cent were on their SMT, with 79.7 per cent having no place on this strategic team within the school. Equally interesting were the responses to Question 7, which asked if the post regularly reported to senior staff within the establishment. Other than the 21.3 per cent on the SMT, only 50 per cent could identify a senior management leader who line managed them but with only 20 per cent reporting regularly on the performance of their area of work. An inference could be made that this means SEN was not considered a whole school issues in those settings, however, this provided insufficient evidence to make that judgement, but was something that was identified as a question that would benefit from further examination in the case study settings.

Due to the breadth of responses in relation to where the role was currently placed in school management structures, this evidence suggested that the development of the role was not seen as prescribed in the current legislation within the Special Educational Code of Practice for Wales:

*The SEN coordinator (SENCo), in collaboration with the head teacher and governing body, plays a key role in helping to*
determine the strategic development of the SEN Policy and provision in school to raise the achievement of pupils with SEN (p.49 paragraph. 5.30)

An interpretation could also be that the development of the role had been left to individual settings, or chance. In some responses it appeared that the strengths of the individual practitioner, rather than strategic management was what had driven the development of the role. As L.Peterson, the Head of NASEN was quoted in Hallett and Hallett (2010:15) as saying:

The role of the SENCo has never been easy to define and has always been open to interpretation. It is a role that has had to move with the times and has evolved in schools, based on the needs of the individual within each establishment.

This research evidence supported the need for further enquiry in the case study schools to determine whether the impact of this factor on SENCo effectiveness could be explored in more depth.

Time allocated to the duties involved in the role was investigated in Question 9. Respondents were asked to identify how much of their time was allocated to timetabled teaching.

![Figure 10](image_url)

**Figure 10**

*Timetabled teaching time for serving SENCos in the sample schools*

The range was extensive, from no timetabled teaching to 70 per cent teaching time. The majority, 16 of 26 returns, taught less than 51 per cent of available time, with five of those teaching less than 25 per cent of time. However, 26.9 per cent taught more than 60 per cent of available time. As the current Code of Practice only identified the SENCo duties, and not the
time allocation to complete those duties, this was an indication of the wide variance in current interpretation of the Code. There were a significant number of duties in the Code of Practice that could only be undertaken during the school day so there needed to be some identification of protected time to enable these duties to be carried out. The current arrangements appeared to reflect the lack of clarity as to the purpose of the role itself, and the criteria used to measure its effectiveness.

Of all the responses, the answers to Question ten reflected the most significant change to the role in recent years. This asked how many staff the post holder line managed. Since the introduction of the Code of Practice, there had been a significant growth of non teaching support in this area of work. The General Teaching Council for Wales identified that in less than ten years the number of teaching assistants in maintained schools in Wales had risen from 2860 (2003/04) to 10,492 (2011/12), whilst the number of teachers registered had remained static. Although this data covers both the primary and secondary sector, the majority of teaching assistants in secondary schools were allocated to deliver specific requirements identified in individual statements of SEN or supported learners with SEN, it does indicate that their management was, in the secondary setting, almost invariably, undertaken by the SENCo.

The majority of respondents referred to their teams as the largest departments in their school, mainly line managing Teaching Assistants (TAs), some teachers and a few other posts, such as school counsellors. The largest team identified in the secondary school returns was 25 staff. This was over 20 per cent of the staff employed by the school. The smallest team was identified as six, which was still on a par, or only slightly smaller, than the size of most core subject departments (English and Maths). 69 per cent of staff managed between ten and 19 staff, with a further 19 per cent managing over 20 staff. Only two participants managed less than ten staff. The implications on workload were significant. As no consistent relationship could be found between responsibilities and time allocation it appeared that this was individually negotiated or was as a consequence of the historic allocation within that school setting.
There were no examples of where non contact time was allocated as a response to a recent analysis of the role, and the duties undertaken. In 2003, the law was changed to introduce the workforce remodelling agenda in Wales. This brought the introduction of the Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) which schools used to re-structure their teaching workforce. The Government did not eliminate SEN responsibility points for those who predominantly directly taught learners with SEN. There was no evidence from the responses that the workload remodelling exercise had led to there being any rationalisation of the role of SENCo. Some still received SEN points as well as a TLR, with one respondent receiving the SEN points instead of a TLR.

I identified that the impact on the workload of current post holders and the balance of their duties in relation to basic line management tasks, along with the time available for strategically leading on work within the school, could be usefully explored in more detail through the case study settings in order to address the research aim regarding effectiveness of the role as identified in objective two:

2. To identify and investigate variables that impact on SENCo effectiveness in the secondary school setting.

Based on the number of staff the post holders line managed it was unsurprising that almost half, 46.1 per cent, identified that dealing with staffing needs including HR processes, performance management and staffing issues, took up a significant amount of their time. Over half, 14 out of the 26 responses, identified assessing the needs of individuals or groups as one of their top three tasks. What needed further investigation was that only 23 per cent saw evaluating the impact of provision they made available to learners with SEN as one of the responsibilities that they spent any significant amount of time on. Only 12 out of 26 participants saw measuring or monitoring pupil progress as one of the top five duties they spent their time undertaking. This provided evidence that the intention of the role of the SENCo as outlined in the Code of Practice was not yet achieved for the Code (2002:148) defined the SENCo role as:
SEN coordinator (SENCo): member of staff of a school or early education setting who has responsibility for coordinating SEN provision within that school. In a small school the head teacher or deputy may take on this role. In larger schools there may be an SEN coordinating team.

The duties of the role of SENCo were identified as:

The SENCo (or team), working closely with the head teacher, senior management and fellow teachers, should be closely involved in the strategic development of the SEN Policy and provision. The SENCo has responsibility for day-to-day operation of the school’s SEN policy and for co-ordinating provision for pupils with SEN, particularly through School Action and School Action plus. (p 64 paragraph. 6:32)

In clarifying what the post holders did with their time, it became clear in the responses that many presumed that their non contact time was there for them to do administrative tasks. 34.6 per cent had no allocated admin support. A further 19 per cent of respondents identified that they had support ‘as and when’ they needed it. Another 19 per cent identified they deployed TAs to undertake administrative tasks as part of their duties. Seven out of the 26 returns identified up to 50 per cent administrative support for their work.

In the schools where there was an understanding that the SENCo was a key management or leadership role within the school, there was a clearer recognition that the role needed administrative support. The variety of the responses that this data represented indicated a lack of clarity and consistency in the interpretation of the current Code of Practice, in relation to the key roles and responsibilities intended for the secondary SENCo. This supported the evidence from the literature review, in work such as Cole (2005), that the interpretations of the role reflected a lack of clarity as to whether the role was that of school leader or manager.

4.1.3 Perceptions of the current post holders – status, duties, responsibilities

In evaluating the responses to Questions 6 and 7 of SENCos completing the questionnaire, the lack of clear connection to management at a whole school level increasingly surfaced as a factor that had a significant impact on how
the practitioner felt they were supported to effectively undertake their role. As Hallett and Hallett (2010:1) concluded:

The SENCo is not always placed at the centre of school development in the way it seems to have been envisaged when the post was introduced.

Their reflections provided a significant insight into their perceptions of the value of their role. The SENCo in School five was clear:

The education needs to be done at the head’s level…we also need to get Governors on board.

The SENCo in School seven was equally clear that being on the SMT made her job achievable:

Being on SMT makes a difference – my faculty has the same ‘gravitas’ as any other..I have the ability to support teaching to improve practice, I know this is rare!

The SENCo in School eight represented his view with passion and frustration:

I still feel that SEN/inclusion is still compartmentalised into our area and is not at the core of the school. I think that the recent appointment of a Deputy Head (ALN) will improve this profile, but sometimes greater strategic vision is needed to move things forward!

This connected to the responses to Question 8 which asked where the role was ranked within the school organisation. A number of colleagues struggled to identify their place in the school hierarchy with references to ‘I’m not sure..’ or ‘I think..’ being common. Other than those on SMT, the majority, 74.9 per cent, saw themselves as a Head of department, although only half of those identified themselves as having the status of a core head such as that of Head of English, Maths or Science department.

In the questionnaire used, Question 12 was divided into sub sections to help the respondents identify and categorise the duties undertaken by them in their current role. The respondents were asked to identify whether they
strategically led, or operationally delivered on the identified activities. Often, they identified they did both. They were then asked to consider those that they felt they spent most of their time on. They were asked to rate those duties from one to five as those they spent most time undertaking. Although subjective, the responses still gave an insight to the current view held by practitioners into the role. To help them identify the duties that took up most of their time, practitioners were given a choice of twenty tasks. These were contained in Figure 11 (below) and broadly covered duties within the Code of Practice including basic responsibilities traditionally associated with Heads of Department and curriculum or strategic development and tasks linked to partnership with parents and agencies. Many did not to rank within the five choices.

The question made sure that the tasks listed provided the participants with clear choices in order to distinguish between leadership and management roles. The first four choices (a, b, c and d) were included to help participants identify those tasks that demanded them to lead on the improvement of practice for others within their setting. Training and recruiting staff were also included (r and t) for SENCos to identify. Some tasks were included that had a direct focus on management responsibilities – timetables, resources and organising the deployment of staff (e, f). Other choices were directly related to SENCo responsibilities identified in the Code of Practice – assessing individuals and groups, writing IEPs and making special arrangements (g, h, i and j). Only 26 of the 28 responses were completed. They were summarised in Figure 11 (below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duty</th>
<th>Frequency chosen in the top five</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Induction of TAs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Induction of Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. NQT/EPD training</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Observing teaching</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Managing timetables</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Managing resources (finance/staffing)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duties most frequently demanding SENCo time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Assessing individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>Assessing groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Writing IEPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>Making special arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>Transition work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>Writing policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>Bidding for funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>Monitoring pupil progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>Evaluating provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>Liaising with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q</td>
<td>Liaising with agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>Training colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>Working with the LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>Recruiting staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 26 respondents to this question, 100% chose at least two that related to fulfilling statutory requirements identified in the Code of Practice within their top five time demanding duties. Nine out of 26 respondents identified all of their top five activities as relating to fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in the Code of Practice.

With 26 participants having five choices the total possible choices were 130, however, only 117 choices were actually made. They are represented below:
What was most noticeable was that only one respondent chose any task that provided the opportunity to develop the practice of others within their setting within their top five choices. The representation in the pie chart starkly shows their confirmation that the majority of their time was spent fulfilling statutory duties. A conclusion that had to be considered, and further explored, was that this focus on meeting statutory requirements had a significant impact on undertaking any strategic or developmental role within their setting. This however, illustrated the broader issue in the literature review that questioned what the role was intended to be, and whether it was reasonable to expect a practitioner to be both someone working at both an operational, and strategic level, within the school setting.

There were very few activities where post holders identified themselves as the strategic lead on an activity. Even if they had they then identified that they made a contribution to the implementation or operation of that duty.

The ‘further comments’ box contained within the questionnaire provided an opportunity for participants to contextualise or personalise their responses. A
minority of participants indicated that where SENCos had a clear role in relation to other duties and responsibilities within the school, they were also clear about what they led on at a whole school level. The respondent from School 28 responded:

SEN is held in high regard – (staff) know it is their duty, with our Head, inclusion is at the centre of what he does....SEN has a high profile here.

The participant from School 25 was equally clear:

...got to come from the top...be underscored by SMT.

Respondents such as these were likely to be ‘coordinating’ activities, as their title suggested, rather than trying to do everything in relation to this area of work.

Having gathered a significant amount of evidence from the questionnaires, the evidence from the case study settings provided more detailed responses to the questions that supported the achievement of the research aim.

4.2 Collecting the evidence from the case study settings

To further develop an evidence base to address the research aim, it was important to analyse, and further explore, the relative importance of what SENCos were feeding back in their questionnaires on their perception of the effectiveness of the role of the secondary SENCo. Previous research in England had relied heavily on the views of currently employed SENCo post holders. Although the views of SENCo practitioners in Wales was vital evidence in any analysis of the current situation, it was felt that the data could be further developed by collating more data on the perceptions of other key practitioners in both the settings and the educational community more broadly, and cross reference it to other documentary evidence.

The key responses identified from Phase 1 of the research had three strands that needed to be tested to evaluate whether they were crucial in all the
cases. These built on the research questions refined after the literature review. The research questions that asked, *What are the expectations on the role of SENCo in the secondary sector, particularly the balance of roles as leader and manager?* and *What impact does the head teacher have on the development of vision, culture and practice in an institution?* were further developed into:

(a) What is the relationship between the SENCo and the management of the school, and in particular how important is it that this is clearly understood and communicated?

(b) How important is it to have a shared understanding regarding the expectations of the role of SENCo within the school? and

(c) What personal and professional skills are identified as crucial for the person undertaking the SENCo duties to have?

These were not new research questions, but provided further refinement and structure to ensure the evidence from the case studies really supported the achievement of the research aim.

The rationale was then that the research would look at the stimulus for change, identify the nature of the changes so that the impact on outcomes for the role of SENCo could be identified, and evaluated. It might also provide insights into the perceptions of what was currently perceived and/or evidenced within the settings as effective or ineffective. Developing this stage of the research intended to pursue deeper questions into ‘how’ and ‘why’ ‘things were, more than just explaining how much of something was done. In an attempt to be more explanatory, the use of case studies became helpful as it provided the opportunity to trace the links and relationships between factors, and the context of these elements, rather than simply assessing the frequency of something taking place.

In this research, the individual case studies were independent of each other so were initially analysed separately. Through comparison and contrast they were then drawn into a single set of ‘cross case’ conclusions.
School X was an inner city secondary, with a relatively new head teacher that has both a strategic lead for inclusion on the SMT, and an identified SENCo to support SENCo duties within the middle management of the school. School Y was a secondary faith school located on a large Council estate which had a recently appointed head teacher from England who was restructuring the school management to focus on impacting on pupil outcomes for all learners, and temporarily promoting the SENCo to the SMT.

A third school, School Z was initially identified but was unable to be included. It was a Welsh medium secondary school with a history of being focused on academic excellence with little strategic emphasis on additional learning needs. With a newly appointed head and the opportunity to appoint a new SENCo to role, this school was seen to be starting again in relation to whole school approaches to SEN. However, this school expressed concern that as it was facing an inspection in that academic year, participation in the research would not be possible. No other school in the research sample was undergoing a significant time of change so School X and Y were visited, and a decision made that they alone would be the case study schools.

As explained in the literature review, additional data was collected through the use of relevant documentation. This should not be underestimated, as the following example from case study school Y illustrates. In case study School Y, a request was made in 2009 for the Local Authority to support the school by reviewing SEN at a whole school level. The Local Authority was concerned as there were a significantly higher number of cases being referred to the SEN Tribunal for Wales where parental dissatisfaction led to legal recourse. The review identified a series of concerns and concluded:

*The school would benefit from revisiting what they identify as the current priorities for inclusion, that are in addition to the priorities for SEN, so that there is a clarity of expectations on the role of inclusion manager.*

The report advised seven major recommendations that the school should implement. These included ensuring that the requirements of the SEN Code of Practice for SEN were being met, developing monitoring systems,
agreeing job descriptions, structures, mapping SEN provision across the school, updating the SEN Policy and agreeing priorities for the department, Senior management team and Governing Body.

Documentation from a Review of Progress in November 2010 noted progress had been made around statutory requirements, although continued to note that progress around roles and responsibilities was still to be made. As a consequence of this review, the new head teacher proposed a major restructure of staffing in 2011.

This example illustrated that the use of the documentary evidence made available for the case studies gave further contextual evidence from work with the setting that enhanced the quality and extent of the evidence regarding the context that the professionals were operating in. It confirmed and validated many of the quantifiable responses provided by the practitioner within the setting in the responses they gave in the interviews.

To ensure evidence was secured, all interviews were digitally recorded and stored securely on computer. Hard records of interviews were transcribed and were kept in the PDP with my handwritten annotated notes. These were transcribed and annotated as soon after the interview as possible. All quotations, school documentation and sources of evidence were kept securely and available to school staff, or for scrutiny by the executive group. Every effort was made to make their meaning clear and represent the interview as fairly as possible. The transcribed interview responses were then annotated to give context to how the responses had been delivered. For example, body language was noted on the transcribed notes (eg. 

*hesitated and looked at the head teacher before speaking or was relaxed and confident in response to this question.*) The annotations were intended to support the contextualising of the evidence, rather than analysing the motivation of the participants.

Once this was done the transcripts were coded thematically to support the achievement of the research aim. Appendix J is an example of Transcript 1 (Appendix C) after it had been initially coded. Codes were used that identified
whether the data related to relationships, clarity of communication, expectations, personal or professional skills. Analysing the qualitative data, and deciding what to report was done by evaluating that there was sufficient data to address the questions through the analysis of the coded response. These were tabulated as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>When 1 we appointed we didn’t want to call it SENCo. I think it could be off putting for the children. So it was your decision to call it ALNCo wasn’t it? (turns to colleagues for agreement) (Colleague nods) ..because we wanted to do it. We have a situation where we have the learning needs but we then have the pastoral manager who looks after the behaviour..basically babysits in that area</td>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Right</td>
<td>EXPECTATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I think behaviour support is very much linked to learning support. Put them together. The new structure includes a Head of Inclusion that puts them together and covers both areas, um... what we do have is someone... (names colleague) at the moment who is on the Leadership Team, that’s more down to (names colleague) than it is down to the role of learning support, SENCo or that kind of thing...</td>
<td>PERSONAL SKILLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>So, in terms of where you currently are, not where you are leading to, where does this role relate to in terms of your current structure? Core Head?</td>
<td>CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No, (turns to colleague for agreement), you’re an Assistant Head, aren’t you? (colleague nods)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Just to talk about you (Turns to SENCo/ALNCo) for a minute. How many years teaching experience do you have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was important for this research to learn how best to report the research findings. Many researchers offered similar advice. Wolcott (2001:20) confirmed:

*You cannot begin writing up early enough! Drafting should proceed even before data collection and analysis have been completed.*
This reference to it being an iterative process was clear. I found it helpful to develop a model of how using case study as an explanation building method could be useful. *Figure 13* outlined how I proposed to write up the mainly qualitative data from Phase 2 of the research.

*Figure - 13 Supporting the research write up*

With this cycle operating, it would then become clear if further evidence, for example a survey of the views of other members of staff or the development
of a further case study school, would be needed for further evidence collection.

4.3 Introduction to Phase 2 results

Known as Cases X and Y the head teachers of Schools X and Y were approached to ask for their consent to participate in the research. Both schools gave immediate consent using the information sheet and Consent Form used previously with all serving SENCos in this study. (Appendices A and B).

Documentation from each school was also requested and made available. When reading the documentation received, I felt that it was important to collect as much information about each setting as possible to accurately contextualise each case study. A series of open interview questions were sent to the participants in advance of the initial interviews. This was to help them prepare for the interviews already requested. Although each secondary school within Wales would see itself as ‘unique’ it had already been argued that all the schools in the study were representative of Welsh schools so the questions to the case study schools were help ensure the participants had some understanding of the nature of the areas that would be explored in the interview.

To triangulate with the documentation received, each school was asked to describe its context. The intention with this was that this would also ensure that scrutiny by others could be as transparent as possible. Consequently, the first question to both school leaders was an open question to outline the context and catchment of their school. This enabled the researcher to confirm the contextual information taken from the most recent ESTYN inspection evidence which was available to the public on the ESTYN website, and ensured that this triangulated with the school view of its own context. This was considered important as, even though each secondary school considers itself ‘unique’, it would confirm that both settings was not ‘atypical’ across the sector in Wales in the challenges that faced them in this area of work.
To identify the impact or outcomes of changes within each case study school, a rich source of evidence was interviews – with the head teacher, senior leaders and post holders. Participants were advised that each session would never take more than one hour of their time, and that interviews would be held separately. Responses were coded according to whether they were addressed to Leaders (L questions) or the SENCo (S questions). The researcher ensured that the research focus, refined after Phase 1 of the research were used to help shape the questions that were asked in Phase 2. The themes were:

(d) What is the relationship between the SENCo and the management of the school, in particular how important is it that this is clearly understood and communicated?
(e) How important is it to have a shared understanding regarding the expectations of the role of SENCo within the school? and
(f) What personal and professional skills are identified as crucial for the person undertaking the SENCo duties to have?

A number of the questions contained within Appendix H and I were included to test their view on the importance of whether the role needed to be a qualified teacher (question 1d for leaders/ question 1c for SENCos), and if the role could easily or potentially move from SEN to ALN. (Questions 8 and 9 for leaders/questions 7 and 8 for SENCos). Other questions investigated responses to the potential national change for a mandatory training requirement (Question 6 for leaders/question 5 for SENCos). In the first interview as the head and SENCo asked to be interviewed together, the responses were written concurrently against the questions identified for each practitioner.

The questions were seeking to support the identified themes in relation to the research questions within the context of the changes taking place within the setting. The first theme – that of whether the relationship between the SENCo and SMT was clear and understood was the theme supported by asking where the post sat within the school structure (question 2c for leaders)
and how the school currently managed ALN (question 7 for leaders/ question 6 for SENCos).

Questions explored whether there was a shared understanding of expectations on the role within the school and were explored by asking both the head and SENCo to identify if expectations were clear. Asking about the responsibilities given (question 2a to leaders /question1a for SENCos) and also asking what their view on the perceptions of mainstream staff was (question 3 for leaders/question1d for SENCos) enabled the research to identify whether the change had caused a more positive working arrangement in this area of work.

The final theme related to the personal and professional skills identified as necessary for the SENCo to need or have. These were sought through asking professionals to articulate the core personal and professional skills that the SENCo needed to have. (question1b for leaders / question1b for SENCos).

The researcher also wanted to investigate the balance of expectations regarding management and leadership responsibilities in the role undertaken by SENCos. Using the work of Becker (1998) that sometimes a question can be operating on two levels, questions were framed about how the school measured the effectiveness of the role and what impacted on that effectiveness. (questions 4 and 5 for leaders/ questions 3, 4 and 5 for SENCos).

Once this data was collected, it was analysed and organised according to the identified case study research design (Figure 4). After a period of between 4 to 6 months, I then returned to the settings for follow up interviews where the focus was on ensuring the school had an opportunity to confirm the changes that had taken place, and to collect data on the schools’ perception of the impact that the changes had had. The participants were also directly asked for their responses to the 3 research strands that had formed the focus of phase 2.
4.4 Case study X results

The results of the data from the case study settings are written up separately and reflect data from both the initial, and follow up interviews. They reflect the framework previously outlined.

4.4.1 School context

When inspecting School X in 2003, ESTYN found it had serious weaknesses. It was then found to have improved significantly when re-inspected in 2004. At each of the inspections there were around 550 pupils on roll, coming from the full range of social backgrounds. Although a significant number came from economically disadvantaged areas; the majority of pupils came from areas which were neither particularly prosperous nor particularly disadvantaged. Twenty-eight per cent of pupils were entitled to free school meals, a figure well above the Welsh average of 15.6 per cent.

At the time of the inspection in 2003 there were 14 pupils with statements of Special Educational Need (SEN) and a further 104 pupils on the SEN register. No pupil spoke Welsh as a first language, and English was the first language of 89 per cent of the pupils; of the remaining pupils, around six per cent received support teaching in English as an additional language (EAL). Between that inspection of 2004 and follow up visits in May 2009 and January 2011, there were temporary management arrangements, and a number of changes at a senior level.

The school was re-inspected in January 2011 when ESTYN confirmed significant progress had been made in leadership and management:

The new senior leadership team has improved the school’s capacity to raise standards. With strong leadership from the head teacher, it provides rigorous challenge and a clear direction to staff and pupils. The senior leadership team has well-defined responsibilities and a shared vision for school improvement. Communication in the school at all levels is effective. Senior leaders provide good opportunities for staff to share best practice. They also challenge underperformance
rigorously. All staff are now fully accountable for improving standards and the quality of teaching. ...The senior leadership team provides effective support for middle leaders. Regular line management meetings have a clear focus on raising standards. These have improved the consistency and effectiveness of middle leaders. Working in collaboration with local schools, the school has an appropriate programme to develop the skills of middle leaders.

These independent regulators confirmed that the school had experienced considerable change. The head confirmed that this was an accurate representation of the context of the school.

The timeline for the case study activity in school X was outlined as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Consent for the case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April/May 2011</td>
<td>Scrutiny of documentation – SEN registers/ referrals to the LA/ staffing structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Interview with Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with SENCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July – September 2011</td>
<td>Analysis of school performance data/ discussion with centrally employed staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>Final interview with Head</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2 Stimulus for change

Prior to the arrival of the current head teacher, the staffing structures for the school identified that the post of SENCo was undertaken by a Teaching Assistant (TA). The Local Authority documentation confirmed that the post holder was efficient and understood the requirements of the Code of Practice. The role had no responsibility for whole school provision. The initial evaluation of the head teacher was:
When I first came, SEN lists were off the scale...they were on the SEN Register for wearing glasses!...IEPs were through the roof.....the tail was wagging the dog....it was being done to get more funding, rather than identify the need.

(interview 1, respondent 1)

At the beginning of the case study, the school and Local Authority documentation confirmed that the school was not managing SEN at a whole school level, with referrals being unco-ordinated, and often with pupils referred through the Code of Practice when there was insufficient evidence of robust internal review processes. Soon after the appointment of the head, the SENCo secured a promotion outside of the school. This provided an opportunity for the head to appoint a SENCo at middle management level. The head confirmed:

When we advertised it said you had (stressed) to be an outstanding teacher...because it was a big issue for us as a school...it wasn’t getting addressed...staff in their planning would plan for the middle, not engage with the less able pupils...that would lead to disengagement......the role had to have leadership potential (stressed) ....at least having that vision.

(interview 1, respondent 1)

A rigorous appointment process was supported by the Local Authority. The interviews included the opportunity to teach a lesson to a group of year seven learners. At this point in the process, the head had eliminated three candidates from the process, explaining that the post was only open to a candidate who could demonstrate outstanding practice themselves. At the end of the process, no appointment was made. The head reviewed the internal capacity within his setting and discussed what the school needed:

We talked about the ability to motivate and inspire pupils and staff...relationships with staff and students...the ability to forge relationships is a key essential...(also) to look at teaching and learning for pupils on the register and the provision – the provision they get.

(interview 1, respondent 1)
In the academic year 2010/11, the head appointed a serving head of
department to the post of SENCo and promoted him temporarily to the Senior
Management Team (SMT) in order to ensure that the post holder:

Could motivate and inspire students and staff and develop
strong relationships.

(Interview 1, respondent 1)

In the final follow up visit, in December 2011, the head outlined that further
changes to the structure had taken place in that the school had adopted a
whole school approach towards managing the needs of pupils with special
and additional needs. This was through the confirmation of a new structure
that contained the post of Head of Inclusion at middle management level who
reported to the Head of Faculty for progress and wellbeing. This person in
turn reported to the Assistant Head for progress and wellbeing who was on
the senior leadership team, with her line manager, the head teacher. The
head explained:

From the top down, bottom up…everyone gets that
message…every month we have an inclusion department
meeting where for everyone in the school someone (stressed)
is representing….the focus is on exploring the best ways to
promote learning for groups of learners.

(Interview 5, respondent 1)

His current Head of Inclusion was an experienced specialist dyslexia teacher
who was identified as an excellent classroom practitioner, and a member of
the middle leadership group within the school.

4.4.3 Response to change

At the time of the first interview the new head and newly appointed SENCo
chose to be interviewed together. The SENCo appeared less relaxed and
confident and appeared to check with the head whether there was a ‘correct’
answer before answering questions. They were given the separate questions
and covered all the areas identified in the prompt sheet. Documentation was
examined in relation to proposed and actual structures, roles and
responsibilities and whole school processes that provided evidence specifically in relation to the identified themes and lines of enquiry.

Evidence in relation to the first aspect of the identified issues to explore – that of the importance of a clearly understood and communicated relationship between the SENCo and the SMT was gathered from a variety of sources. Job descriptions, for the previous and current post holders were scrutinised, as well as interview responses to identified questions. The SENCo understood his role to be,

(Ultimately) doing yourself out of a job!... assistants (operational staff) who can take over the day to day aspects...I look after the strategic aspects. She (the assistant) takes over a lot of the time consuming areas so that we are able to look at the big picture- look at achievement, and provision...rather than being bogged down with(providing the ) support on a day to day basis.

(Interview 1, respondent 2)

In the final follow up visit for the case study research, the head was even more clear that the further restructure had led to a clear ‘line of sight’ for this area of work that identified clear communication mechanisms at a whole school level with the retention of a senior management, Assistant Head role, with overall responsibility.

In response to one of the identified issues to pursue in relation to the importance of a shared understanding of the expectations on the role, the head confirmed:

She (the newly appointed Head of Inclusion) does things like a pupil trail to follow up on what (has been agreed) she makes sure they are getting what she is saying they should get... she’s having tough conversations with people if it’s not happening.

(interview 5, respondent 1)

The head was particularly clear when referring to the third strand regarding the personal and professional skills required of the practitioner. For the head and SLT, the requirement was for someone to be able to hold people to
account in a way that was compatible with the school’s ethos. For him, it was also a professional development role that would lead to further career progression. Both the appointment of the interim SENCo, and that of the Head of Inclusion was characterised by a clarity regarding the personal and professional skill set that the post holder needed in the school. The head summarised:

Someone who can deal with pressure, capability to take on extra, someone who is reflective, but a do-er… someone who is not frightened to question decisions and question the status quo…honest, reliable….someone who has the credibility in the sense of their peers in school…and credible that they can represent the school in a professional arena.

(interview 5, respondent 1)

The responses to the broader questions regarding changes in national policy were initially met with a mixed response in School X. The head initially reflected that the SENCo role could be done by a non teaching member of staff, but on further elaboration, identified that he felt some of the duties could be done by non teachers if supervised by a member of the SMT, but an essential skill needed to credibly undertake the role was that the post holder had to be an outstanding teacher. This illustrated the need to have a clear understanding of what the requirements of the post actually were.

The SENCo confirmed that some of the current duties could, and maybe should, be undertaken by a non teaching member of staff, but that would not give the role the status necessary to impact at a whole school level if the whole of the role was assigned to a member of the support staff. When gathering feedback on the requirement for mandatory training for the role, the head was absolutely clear, the training should focus on the leadership of this area of work:

I think the role is more the leader than the knowledge of the areas of SEN.....this should be a leadership qualification.

(interview 1 respondent 1)

The SENCo confirmed that the qualification should focus on:
The head of department/ leadership type thing.....leading a team.....raising achievement.

(interview 1, respondent 2)

The requirement regarding the personal and professional skills of the post holder in school X was clear, they had to have the ability to lead others, and they had to have a solid professional credibility to work at a whole school level.

4.4.4 Impact/outcomes of change

As I undertook follow up interviews in the case study settings, between four and six months later, the previous section shows that I was able to follow up with both the SENCo and the management team whether or not the restructure had achieved the desired ends identified by them at the start of the case studies. Primarily, this evidence was collected by interviewing the SENCo and Senior Leaders within the school.

As the School Standards Unit had been created by the Minister for Education in Wales in 2011, national and local performance data was also analysed at this time. In the new national banding system, under the new Welsh Government Standards Unit, School X was identified nationally (in 2011) as one of the most improved secondary schools in Wales, going from Band 5 in the confidential banding exercise in the Autumn of 2011(based on 2010 performance data), to Band 1 in the published banding exercise of December 2011(based on 2011 school performance data.).

The next chapter will draw research conclusions in relation to the evidence gathered from this case study however, the issues that appeared to be clearly communicated through this part of the research were that, in this setting, the role of SENCo did not appear to be a ‘set’ or ‘fixed’ job within the school. Rather, there appeared to have developed a clear and agreed set of responsibilities that could be deployed within the setting so that it was flexible and responsive to the current needs of the setting. This appeared to concur with Peterson’s (2010) belief that it may not be a bad thing if the role ‘moves with the times.’ The importance in the analysis of the success of School X
was that the development of the role was not left to chance. It was purposely developed in line with developments at a whole school level.

The case study school confirmed that they had also spent a considerable amount of time and energy on clarifying the accountability structure within the school. Expectations were agreed and shared so that everyone was clear on what they were responsible for, and how that fitted into the management of SEN at a whole school level.

4.5 Case study Y

Case study setting Y was researched at the same time and using the same framework for data collection.

4.5.1 School context

In its last inspection, September 2010, ESTYN identified High School Y as an 11-18 mixed community school. The school served some areas which were economically disadvantaged. The school was culturally diverse and at the time of the inspection there were 1440 pupils on roll, including 254 students in the sixth form. In 2009/10, 36.8 per cent of pupils were eligible for free school meals (FSM). This figure is well above the Welsh national average of 17.1 per cent.

There were 2.8 per cent of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) and a further 25 per cent who required additional support. The percentage of compulsory age pupils on the SEN register was 28.6 per cent which was above the national average of 20.9 per cent. In 2010, 41.3 per cent of 15 year (Y) old pupils were on the SEN register. The head teacher was appointed permanently to the post in September 2009. There had been three head teachers in post since the last inspection.

The school’s aims were to create a supportive, caring and inspiring learning community in which all learners grow in self-worth and self-esteem. The head
teacher confirmed that this was an accurate representation of the context of the school.

The timeline for the case study activity in relation to school Y was outlined as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 2011</td>
<td>Consent for the case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>Scrutiny of documentation – SEN registers/ referrals to the LA/ staffing structures/ analysis of progress against the LA review of SEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Interview with Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with SENCo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July – September 2011</td>
<td>Analysis of school performance data/ discussion with centrally employed staff/ Link officer (LA) discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>Final interview with Head/ SLT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2 Stimulus for change

The previous staffing structure for the school identified that the school had made a substantial financial commitment to the role of Head of Inclusion. With the permission of the school, Local Authority documentation on the school was made available to me, who was accompanied to some meetings in the school by a Local Authority Officer who knew the school very well, having supported them for some years. The officer did not take part in the research interviews. As this school had been a great cause of concern to the Local Authority, there was more documentation made available to the
research to track involvement with the school, particularly in relation to SEN issues.

The LA review of SEN within the school, which took place in the academic year 2009/10, confirmed that the LA had significant concerns with SEN process and practices within the school. This had resulted in poor outcomes for some learners, and issues of lack of compliance in some aspects of the Code of Practice. This was in spite of the senior role being the highest paid in all the schools in Phase 1.

Progress was closely monitored by the LA Officer, with formal reviews taking place in April and November 2010. Subsequent to the follow up visit from the review, the head teacher, having discussed the issues with the Local Authority, identified the need to restructure SEN and adopt a more holistic approach to the additional needs of learners within the school.

4.5.3 Response to change

The head teacher proposed to delete the role of Head of Inclusion and identified a new structure with a senior management role of ALN co-ordinator as well as a Curriculum Access post. This was in addition to maintaining a SENCo role at middle management level. The costed structure charts provided by the school confirmed that they were investing in this more whole school approach, rather than apparently saving on the senior salary in the previous structure.

The head teacher confirmed:

*The whole point of the new structure ....ideally...is that more and more pupils will achieve success through the overall provision in the curriculum.....(the ALNCo).. are responsible for everyone within the school who has ALN...then the curriculum access person...is responsible for everyone who has barriers to learning....the SENCo has the statutory aspects...and there are also two specialist people – one with behaviour and one with specific learning difficulties.*

(interview 2, respondent 3)
In response to the broader question of whether the SENCo post could be undertaken by a non teaching member of staff, School Y, were clear that the school needed to clarify those administrative tasks that non teachers could and should perform to support serving SENCos, and those duties that only a qualified teacher could do. The SENCo was not so sure. She felt that the role could ‘not really’ be undertaken by a non teacher, but didn’t feel it never could be.

When the researcher pursued the first theme identified for this phase of the research - *What is the relationship between the SENCo and the management of the school, in particular how important is it that this is clearly understood and communicated?* The head reflected a clear response. Clarity in relation to the relationship between the role of the SENCo and the SMT was vital. One recommendation from the initial review of SEN within the school had been that the department needed clear job descriptions agreed for all staff. The head stressed the importance of this in her new structure. A consultation process, with full union involvement, was undertaken to ensure that the roles were agreed, understood and communicated. This was supplemented by clarity regarding the processes that would work within the school.

In relation to the second theme to pursue - *How important is it to have a shared understanding regarding the expectations of the role of SENCo within the school?* - there was evidence in the documentation from the consultation process for a whole school restructure that the SENCo role was regularly discussed in relation to a number of key roles including those responsible for the management of pastoral care within the school, so that there was a clear understanding of where responsibility lay for all operational and strategic aspects of this area of work.

The third theme for this identified for this phase of the research - *What personal and professional skills are identified as crucial for the person undertaking the SENCo duties to have?* - that of addressing the personal and professional skills required to successfully under take the role, was best answered when the head and the SENCo related it to the question regarding the focus for any
requirements for mandatory training. They expressed their views clearly. The head believed:

(The post has)...got to be able to model good...get on with people.... not get bogged down with paperwork.... their skills and qualities are more important.

(interview 2 respondent 3)

The SENCo confirmed that managing staff had to be at the core of any qualification with being ‘clear about what you have to do in the role’ being core to the course. (Interview 3 respondent 4)

In following up the case study in research interviews in December 2011, both the head, and the Senior Leadership Team confirmed in an extended interview with the team, that they had further clarified what personal and professional skills the post holder needed to have. The assistant head explained:

They (the key post holder) need to have ‘doggedness’.. be clear in the vision and clear in the practice, relentless… a ‘superhero! People and solution focused...with high expectations.

(interview 4, respondent 5)

4.5.4 Impact/outcomes of changes

As part of the triangulation, the researcher undertook follow up activities, as identified in the research schedule, between four and six months after the initial interviews. As already stated, primarily, these were interviews with the Senior Leaders within the school, although national and local performance data was also analysed.

In the new national banding system, under the new Welsh Government Standards Unit, School Y, was identified nationally as a secondary school experiencing considerable improvement when compared to other secondary schools in Wales, going from Band 4 in the confidential banding exercise in the Autumn of 2011, to Band 2 in the published banding exercise of December 2011.
Again, the issues clarified in this case study will be analysed in the following chapters, but what was clearly evident from the responses within School Y was the need for someone – in this case, the head teacher, to recognise the need for the school to have a holistic view on the leadership and management of this area of work. The clear focus on the success of individual learners, and their outcomes, rather than a reliance on statutory process, ironically led to processes being clearer and better managed than they had been in years. The school managed to create a situation where even though improving outcomes was more important than processes, the school was more compliant with statutes than they had ever been!

The next chapter will further analyse the impact of the changes that the research studied so that research conclusions and recommendations can be clearly identified in relation to the research aim and objectives.
Chapter 5  Evaluating the case study research evidence

The research design (Figure 4) had identified that the case studies would be undertaken as separate cases but, as the literature review had clarified, the cases had to be analysed as something more than simply the stories of two secondary schools. This chapter will analyse the learning from the results of the research to enable the next chapter to draw conclusions and propose recommendations.

5.1 Comparing and contrasting the stimulus for change

Although the stimulus for change in the two case studies were clearly different, the main similarity was that of a change in senior leadership which brought to the school a clearer focus on improving achievement in relation to all learners.

As a significant number of the areas investigated in the case study settings had been identified through the initial questionnaire with practising SENCos across the two local authorities, it was also important to cross reference whether the research findings added further to the initial areas of investigation that Phase 1 had identified.

The themes identified for Phase 2 of the research included the question: What is the relationship between the SENCo and the management of the school, particularly how important is it that this is clearly understood and communicated? This produced interesting results. Prior to undertaking this research what was under-estimated was the impact of the head teacher on the development of this work.

In both cases, change was driven by leaders who were motivated by a clear vision of what their school needed to do in relation to all learners. Their clarity was non negotiable. They were driven by a clear personal and professional agenda to improve outcomes for all the learners in their care. This concurred with the research undertaken by Cole (2005) in England when she concluded that the values of individual head teachers impact directly on the position,
work and power of the SENCo. It appears that the clarity achieved by the head teachers in the case study schools compensated for the lack of clarity nationally as to what the role of SENCo should achieve in relation to the often conflicting areas of trying to be both a leader and manager.

This driver for change appeared key in revisiting the whole school nature of this area of work. In School X, the SENCo post, whilst undertaken by a conscientious Teaching Assistant, was insufficiently embedded into the whole school structure to impact on practice at a whole school level. In School Y, the role and responsibilities undertaken by a post holder in a senior role was ineffective in addressing whole school SEN practices and provision as they had neither a clear whole school framework within which to operate nor a clear personal understanding of the requirements of the whole school role.

The second theme for Phase 2 of the research - How important is it to have a shared understanding regarding the expectations of the role of SENCo within the school? - also provided some interesting data. To ensure progress, there appeared a clear link in both settings between securing an understanding on the duties of all post holders within the school, and those duties that needed to be done by someone holding the responsibility of the SENCo post.

This corroborated the findings of the Phase 1 research. In the minority of cases where SENCos knew where they sat in relation to the management of whole school provision, and where reporting arrangements were clear, they felt they were more effective to undertake the duties and responsibilities of their role. In the case study settings it was important that there was a shared understanding regarding the expectations of the role between all parties within the setting. This concurred with the findings from the research of Blandford and Gibson (2000) who concluded that the SENCo who was trying to be a ‘player manager’ could only achieve success in the role if there was effective communication within the school and between key leaders and managers. The evidence suggested that the need to do things differently had to be acknowledged and more importantly driven by the senior management, before progress could be made.
When asked to explain the success of achieving a whole school approach to this area of work, both head teachers identified that their role was key. Head of School X confirmed:

*It’s got to be a priority of the head because, as with many things, if it was sold as ‘someone’s mission’ it would not work…it was me and her (Inclusion manager) that sold this…giving her the opportunities to show what her vision was, not just to give her tasks…guiding, rather than controlling.*

*(interview 5, respondent 1)*

His passion was as clear as that of his counterpart in School Y who concluded:

*We have a really strong team now, we have all got down to an individual pupil level….first of all we dealt with the major issues….what we are really working on this year is what we actually have to do to make a difference. The systems are (now) there, now we ask ‘how can we improve them?’ ‘How will we know we have done so?’*

*(interview 4, respondent 3)*

The head of School X concluded:

*In terms of schools, the people tend to listen to what the head is pushing for!...that is something that gets done!*  

*(interview 5, respondent 1)*

Again, this confirmed the findings raised by the practitioners through their questionnaire responses. Where there was clarity on responsibilities and a clear understanding of how roles fit into the hierarchy, there was a clearer understanding of what the expectations were on the role of SENCo. This supported the conclusions drawn from the research undertaken by Oldham and Radford (2011) who concluded that the response to the tensions around the role of SENCo could *either* be to formalise the role in new statute *or* reduce the role to that of implementing provision for learners with SEN. There would then be a need to focus the management of whole school provision universally at a senior management level. The implications of this learning
from the research will be further discussed when the implications for policy and practice are explored in the concluding chapter.

5.2 Comparing and contrasting the process of change

As School X and School Y had a different starting point in relation to the structure and job descriptions they were using, it is unsurprising that they approached the process of change in different ways. School X identified the need to address practice, so identified the need for an outstanding practitioner as key. School Y took advantage of the support offered by the Local Authority review of this area of work, to work through identified issues, culminating in a major staffing restructure at a whole school level.

The similarities in both cases relate to the aspect of the identified issues from Phase 1 that were pursued and then tested in the case studies – both heads felt it was vital to clearly understand and communicate the relationship between the role of SENCo and the role of the Senior Management or Senior Leadership Team (SMT/SLT). Considerable time and energy was expended by managers in both cases to ensure there was a shared understanding regarding the expectations on the role. There was also a considerable amount of work concerning how processes needed to be implemented to support the achievement of shared objectives in relation to improving aspects of this work across the whole school.

In pursuing the final research theme in Phase 2 - *What personal and professional skills are identified as crucial for the person undertaking the SENCo duties to have?* - what was also clear from both cases was that the school leadership developed clarity regarding the personal and professional skills that needed to be identified as crucial for the person undertaking the role. Both cases understood that the *role needed to clarify the Leadership and the Management aspects required*. This was articulated in clear job descriptions that were linked to pupil achievement and improving outcomes, and resulted in empowering managers to address colleagues in respect of their responsibilities to all learners in their care. This was in contrast to
previous job descriptions that were much more focused on SEN processes rather than the outcomes for learners with SEN.

What was under-estimated prior to the research, and not identified in the research in England, was the importance of the rigour with which senior leadership teams in both case studies focused in on ensuring there were clear systems that started with the individual learner, and the progress they made in their time at school. The significance of this research finding will be explored in the research conclusions. The head of School X explained:

*Ultimately, it’s my head on the block. There is a clear level of accountability….we re-wrote our mission statement, we got rid of the notion of ‘achieving the best’ – presuming we were doing that, now it is, ‘to achieve the best for all’ – that is really the emphasis on all we try to do.*

(interview 5, respondent 1)

### 5.3 Evaluating the impact/ outcomes of change

At the outset of the national project and at the beginning of this research, the initial national perspective was that the role of SENCo had to be a senior management role to have an impact on practice. The evidence of this research does not corroborate this view. What became clear was that positive impact was achieved when there was clarity on who did what, and how/what reporting arrangements there were.

One Local Authority had made a local requirement to an SEN/ALN lead identified on every senior leadership team in the county. However, the evidence from the Phase 1 research questionnaires did not appear to necessarily lead to any greater clarity or impact on outcomes. There was not necessarily any greater impact on outcomes for learners in those settings. What appeared to be more significant was whether there was clarity on the respective roles and responsibilities between all parties in each individual setting that led to a more united approach to raising the standards of all learners within the setting.
What was similar in both cases was the high expectations that the head teacher placed on themselves, and their colleagues. What was unexpected was the extent to which the head teacher only had a significant effect on the pace and extent of change, if they drove the process for themselves, rather than relied on others within the establishment. This was evidenced by the clarity that each head teacher presented in their interviews that they were leading the change process, rather than delegating it to another manager within the setting.

Although inevitably, both settings had a very different starting point, and took a very different direction in how they managed the change process, there were remarkable similarities in the outcomes of the processes. It was expected that seniority would have an impact on progress within the setting, what was unexpected was how significant it was for staff to know how they fitted into the structure, rather than how senior they were.

Although the initial research confirmed that there was a lack of clarity in the expectations on the role across the secondary SENCo practitioner group, the extent of the variety of interpretation within settings on the current role was not expected. The analysis of the responses to the questionnaires confirmed the results of Blandford and Gibson (2000) in that it appeared that the role of SENCo had a tendency to spiral out of control. Their research conclusions - that the lack of training and insufficient time to fulfil the duties of the role leads to a 'juggling of identities' - was confirmed. This research confirmed that there is still a resulting confusion in the SENCo role with colleagues trying to be both teacher and manager, or ‘player/manager’ as their research identified.

During the time that this research was taking place, there was a noticeable change in the national agenda with regard to school improvement. In 2011, the Minister for Education, Leighton Andrews, made a landmark speech (29/06/11) that placed a significantly greater emphasis on schools being more accountable for their achievements with learners. This led to an increasing emphasis on the analysis of learner outcomes in each setting. In the autumn of 2011, the Minister set up a Standards Unit and charged it with
the initial responsibility of measuring the performance of all state secondary schools in Wales. This resulted in all schools being 'banded' into one of five categories, determined by the analysis of their GCSE performance of year 11 pupils, in the summer of 2011. This data was publicised on December 8th 2011. Almost inevitably, this resulted in schools being under increased pressure to perform well in the particular metrics measured in the banding exercise.

Three national priorities were identified and communicated by the Minister for Education. Improving basic Literacy and Numeracy and combating the impact deprivation has on learner outcomes were the indicators that schools would be held to account for in relation to the progress all learners make during their time in school.
Chapter 6. Conclusions and recommendations

The Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) outlines the learning from this research that I can identify for myself as a professional. This chapter will now outline both the overall research conclusions and the recommendations it makes.

6.1 Achieving the research aim and objectives – research conclusions

The first research objective - to critically review current legislation - was achieved through the literature review. Pursuing this objective also opened up the opportunity to lead a national debate with assistant directors of education concerning the use of language used in this field. Through events outlined in the PDP (which follows this chapter) a national process was started that resulted in a clear need to confirm a definition on the terminology at a national level, so that there could be a greater clarity for practitioners in this area prior to changes in statute.

Through the work I was doing professionally that was concurrent to how this research was unfolding, it became increasingly clear for practitioners that the terminology had to be clarified at a national level. ‘SEN’ has a legal definition in the Code of Practice, with ALN being proposed as a concept in the national guidance, without a clear definition in law. The definition I proposed increasingly became useful to practitioners who were asking national government to clarify the terminology. Identifying those vulnerable to underachievement is an important distinction to make from those who have a legally defined special educational need.

In relation to the social and political context within which it was written in, I would conclude that the Code of Practice for SEN was being implemented at a time when the expectations on the role of the SENCo in mainstream schools had no clarity at a national level as to whether the emphasis should, or could, be on both care and entitlement. The system was insufficiently mature to enable the role to be undertaken successfully, however detailed
the expectations were in the Code of Practice. Consequently, the current legislative framework was, and still is, fighting to clarify what the expectations are for both the learners it is intending to protect, and the professionals who are trying to implement it.

Progress in changing statute has been slower than anticipated. The original broader pilot project timeframes have been extended. In the summer of 2012, the Welsh Government launched a national consultation process to gather responses to inform further developments in relation to the broader pilot projects. The proposals provided a focus for all statutory and voluntary agencies to consider the concept of children with ‘Additional Needs’ rather than ‘Additional Learning Needs’ being those that changes in statute needed to take account of. This was attempting to address the difficulties of identifying those with ‘Additional Learning Needs’ (ALN) who may be vulnerable to underachievement, by proposing that those with ‘Additional needs’ actually had an identified, and agreed, need that causes them to need additional support from agencies.

The national consultation group of heads and SENCo practitioners has been reformed to shape the progress of the statutory reform agenda. I have been invited onto that group to contribute to the next phase of the national development agenda. The evidence of this research is beginning to be shared within that forum to help understand the current practice and identified difficulties with the current interpretation of the Code of Practice and the terminology currently in use in relation to the national agenda.

The objective relating to investigating the variables that impacted on secondary school SENCo effectiveness was explored both through the questionnaires, and within the case study schools. SENCos themselves cited all the factors they perceived impacted on their own performance in the role: status, good support staff, clarity of expectation, professional knowledge, personal skills and a whole school approach to SEN were all seen to be important factors that enabled them to do their job.
Evaluation of the Code of Practice for Wales (2002) in the Literature Review confirmed that although national government believed there to be clear expectations on the role, the interpretation of the expectations of the role were shown throughout the research to be a significant difficulty for practitioners in the field. This supported the results from the English research undertaken by Pearson (2008) into the SENCo role that concluded that there was a far from uniform situation in existence in relation to the role as currently undertaken. This research would agree with Pearson that the attitudes towards the role and the perceptions of its desirability as a career option vary greatly.

This research concludes that the most significant variable that impacts on the effectiveness of the SENCo is the degree to which expectations of the role are agreed within the individual setting at an early stage. To be able to identify what is reasonable to expect of the role, both the case study schools would confirm that the primary focus should not be on a list of the duties and responsibilities to be undertaken by the post holder. Each setting is unique, and attempting to legislate to that level of detail would lead to the same difficulties experienced with the current Code of Practice. As Hallett and Hallett (2010) identified after the changes in England, the place of the SENCo may well now need to be at the heart of the school development process if schools are to be properly supported to be equipped to deal with the range of need presented in mainstream settings.

In researching the perceptions of effectiveness from the personnel engaged in the field it became clear from Phase 1 that there was little agreement across schools as to what ‘effective’ practice could be identified as. Many SENCos were primarily engaged in creating and implementing processes and systems in response to the demands of the Code of Practice. They had no strategic lead identifying, monitoring or evaluating whether this was leading to a more positive impact on learner outcomes. This resulted in a disconnection between practice and impact and a model that was based on care for vulnerable learners with little challenge on raising standards of achievement. As Blandford and Gibson (2000) identified in their research, the
difficulty in Wales is the same as that identified in England – there is a lack of clarity in knowing what the role required. Until this key role knows whether it is intended to be a practitioner ‘player’ or a manager, there will continue to be a variety of interpretations in each setting in Wales.

In addressing the final research objective of ‘what further systems or processes were needed to support the further development of the role’, the primary conclusion has to be that national government needs to understand that, although further training, particularly in how to lead and manage people, is desirable, the major change has to be in relation to the previous objective. Schools and leaders need to understand that systems and processes for pupils with SEN or ALN only exist to provide frameworks in which learner outcomes can be improved.

As part of the process of undertaking this doctorate I researched the impact of culture on educational change. Outram (2004) proposed that it takes considerable force to get a large body to change direction, making it difficult to achieve change. This research provided no evidence that ‘inertia’ could, or would, stop an individual school institution planning and implementing considerable change. It did confirm the work such as those of Kotter (1996) who identified the importance of culture in shaping and changing how organisations change. Both case study head teachers demonstrated a commitment to the implementation of a whole school approach to the leadership and management of meeting the needed of learners with SEN. This made engagement by the whole staff non negotiable for all other staff in their settings. The work of Hussey (2000) that advocated the belief that systems and processes need to validate the messages of culture that leaders and managers communicate to staff in their settings, was confirmed in both case studies. Both Heads made changes to their whole school systems and structures that supported their views on the culture they wanted for their organisations regarding meeting the full range of need in their school population. ‘SEN’ was clearly identified as a whole school issue, rather than the responsibility of one individual.
The evidence analysed from the contribution of these school leaders and managers illustrated that successfully managing change was a balancing act. As Hussey (2000) proposed, the case study settings illustrated that balancing the need for change and maintaining the desire to keep proven practices that work, could be achieved if well led and managed.

When addressing what professional development was needed, the developments in England were informative to outline the English proposed way forward but could not merely be replicated in Wales for a variety of reasons, not least because the funding arrangements were different but, more importantly, because the outcome of that huge financial commitment to training was yet to be fully evaluated. The conclusion of this research is that the Welsh Government needs to further investigate who needs further training, and for what purpose. It would be a missed opportunity if this training were not placed at the heart of the school improvement agenda. As the Minister has a commitment to the three national priorities, work to train staff to lead and manage better outcomes for SEN and ALN learners should not be restricted to those who hold the title of ‘SENCo’ or ‘ALNCo’. The evidence from this research would argue that all learners, including those with SEN, make more progress if there is a whole school commitment to meeting the needs of individual learners rather than believing that one post holder – the SENCo/ALNCo - would be better to work with some pupils in isolation.

The aim of this research:

‘To investigate the effectiveness of the secondary SENCo role in Wales: the perspective of professionals identified in case studies’

was to give a voice to a number of practitioners who sometimes reflected that they felt that professionally things were often done ‘to’ them rather than ‘with’ them. With a professional background in the field of SEN education, I wanted to give a voice to those professionals and identify what could be learned from listening to their views. For a new researcher, the learning from the research process was immense. The development of the research objectives and the
identification of the research questions provided a framework to support the researcher to achieve the aim.

This research confirmed the findings of the research in England undertaken by Cole (2005) who identified that SENCos were overwhelmed at an operational level with little time, support or funding to undertake the strategic role. However, one of the most significant findings of this research is that it does not agree with her findings that the post should be redefined as a senior management post so that schools would have ‘at least one powerful advocate for the vulnerable’.

In contrast, this research concluded that there is a greater impact on the outcomes for those with SEN and ALN when there is a team of people, led by the head teacher, focusing on an individual approach to the needs of learners in their setting. The SENCo does need to have status within the school, but not necessarily need to be on the senior management team as illustrated in the case study. The learning from this research is that the emphasis should not be on the structure of SEN/ALN but on the clarity of systems that schools implement to support learner outcomes in this area of work.

In both case study settings there was confirmation of the work of Fullan (2010) in that where heads and teams made small but easy to understand changes, there were ‘stunningly powerful consequences’. In the two case study schools, impact was measurable in a relatively short period of time. Further research into the long term impact of the changes introduced by the new leadership approaches in both settings would be needed to confirm that the positive impact had been maintained. This research would support the conclusions of Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) that more work needs to be done on sustaining changes that take place in education, rather than rushing from one statutory framework to another.

The case studies appeared to confirm the work of the longitudinal study by Hargreaves and Goodwin (2006) in their belief that changes in leadership are one of the most dramatically and directly powerful factors that provoke changes in individual schools. The impact of the role of the head teacher
which came through in both phase 1 of the research and very clearly in both case studies is one that Welsh Government need to take note of. Training for head teachers in the area of SEN and ALN should be an area of educational practice that they need to legislate in regard to mandatory training. This should be in addition to, and not instead of, SENCo or ALNCo training. This research conclusion is more in line with the work of Belbin (1996) when he advocated ‘team empowerment’. It would confirm that any change in national approach to this area of education should not rely on one strategic leader, be it SENCo or ALNCo, to be the ‘champion’ of the cause.

The Literature Review undertaken as part of this research, particularly in relation to managing educational change, was helpful in interpreting the results of the research. This research confirmed the work of Kotter (1996:6) in that it identified that internally generated change was more powerful than that which was externally prescribed. It appeared that when people were shown how change improved performance they responded. The leaders who personified how you approach your work as a manager were more effective in leading change than someone who stepped in and directed how people needed to act. The challenge for Welsh Government in preparing for a new legislative framework is to ensure it identifies the expected outcomes for learners with special and additional needs, rather than rely on a framework which outlines expected process in this area of work.

A further conclusion from this research is paralleled in the recent research conclusions of Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010). There must be a balance between change at an individual level and change at an organisational level. The Welsh Government may change the national legislative framework in terms of national structure for the role, but in implementation of legislation, real improvement will only take place at the level of the practitioner within the individual institutional level. National change will not be sufficient to successfully drive organisational change in an individual institution. Their conclusions that there must be conscious change leadership before true transformational change takes place appears ratified through this research. Unless mindset, behaviour and culture accompany
changes in systems, there will not be true transformational change taking place in national practice in Wales.

This research has highlighted some of the significant difficulties that previous researchers have identified. An example of this is found in the recommendations in the research of Rosen-Webb (2011). She proposed that recruitment initiatives and development programmes needed to consider the dynamic between the expected management roles of the SENCo and their expected teaching commitment. She concluded that there has to be a balance between management training and specialist teacher training, however this research would conclude that this indicates the confusion in the expectations on the current role. Delivering direct provision to children and young people with SEN and managing their provision are two different roles. Professionals should not be trying to manage the balance of the roles but, rather, should be clarifying the expectations on the separate role of SENCo/leader and manager and SENCo/deliverer of specialist provision.

Although the initial aim of this research did not focus on the outcomes and standards learners with SEN achieved in each setting, as this research reports, both the schools in the case studies made significant improvement in improving the outcomes for vulnerable learners. This evidence could not be ignored. The changes the schools implemented at a strategic level in the area of SEN learners were within the context of meeting the needs, and improving the outcomes, for all learners in their settings. What could not have been expected, or predicted, at the start of the research was the importance the performance of every 16 year old in mainstream schools was going to have in relation to how school effectiveness was going to be judged by the Minister. This may well need close monitoring in secondary school settings as these are learners whose progress cannot always be wholly, or successfully, measured solely against their academic progress. The issues that this may create for this area of work cannot be underestimated. The tension that may increase between raising the standards of achievement for the majority of learners and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable learners may create difficulties for schools to identify where their emphasis
should be. This may well be an area that will need to be explored through further research.

6.2 Recommendations and discussions for future policy development

This work was prompted by a professional concern that changes were going to take place in the educational field of SEN and ALN that did not have a robust evidence base to support that change.

A recommendation must be that full consideration should be given to the training programme across all roles in education, particularly the role of head teacher. In 2012, this researcher changed post and became a secondary head teacher. Although there was a supportive and varied professional development programme, there was no statutory obligation for any head teacher to undertake any mandatory training in relation to SEN or ALN.

This research would also recommend that to address this, any revision of legislation at a national level needs to identify that there must be an expected framework in each setting that demands that leaders and managers work collaboratively with all partners. This should focus on ensuring there are effective whole school practices to support all vulnerable learners, as well as efficient communication systems between all partners. What is also vital are clear expectations on what the appointed post holder is intended to achieve in the role and clarity in terms of performance indicators or equivalent performance management measures.

It would be a recommendation of this research that the focus of any statutory framework should be the legal requirement for each school to ensure there is a whole school focus on improved outcomes for all learners that is demonstrated in whole school processes and procedures that do not solely rely on one person being the ‘champion’ of those with special or additional needs. The responsibilities can then be flexibly allocated. Case study school X and school Y illustrated this as it clearly showed that the needs of schools change over time, so a focus on process and outcomes is more productive for the learners than solely a focus on a list of duties for one key post holder.
One of the most significant difficulties for current practice in secondary settings is the tension that now exists in relation to supporting the inclusion agenda, whilst balancing this against the increased public pressure for schools to improve examination performance. The impact of inclusion policies on the profile of learners in our mainstream settings has led to considerable change in recent years. Learners with more complex needs are being supported to achieve in mainstream settings. Special schools are exempt from publishing their performance data as there is an acknowledgement that measuring progress of pupils with often quite complex needs cannot solely be represented by examination or test performance, however, all secondary settings have to do this.

The real danger is that the current national climate of increased accountability regarding the performance of individual schools may soon begin to run counter to the will to include all learners in all settings. If the school is a popular, over-subscribed school, there may be no requirement, or motivation, to include learners with more complex needs if there is competition for places in the setting.

The implications for policy are immense. This research is not advocating a situation of no accountability for learners with additional needs in mainstream settings but is, rather, proposing that the national government must ensure there is real clarity regarding not only what the national government expects these learners to be provided with, but also what they expect these learners to achieve. Further work must be undertaken to ensure there is shared national understanding of what reasonable progress is for learners who have an additional need that requires additional support to enable them to achieve their potential in school. This also depends on the focus of their need, for example, progress for a child with significant behavioural or emotional needs may be very different to that of a child with significant speech and language delay.

What is needed as a matter of urgency, therefore, is research that supports a nationally agreed framework of what appropriate or accelerated progress is for learners with special or additional needs. Without this, some schools may
be reluctant to continue to fully embrace an inclusive approach to secondary education. Whilst it would be inappropriate to generalise from the results of two case study settings, this research would suggest that adopting a whole school approach to managing SEN and ALN that places learner needs rather than processes at the heart of planning, is something that merits further research and investigation.

6.3 Personal reflections

This research has been a journey. It is documented in the Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) contained as a separate section at the end of this thesis. What began as a professional interest developed into an undertaking that led the researcher into a project that became all consuming. The passion and commitment of professionals in this field was overwhelming, their desire to ‘get it right’ for some of the most vulnerable learners was humbling.

In undertaking this work, as researcher there has been the development of an understanding of how, as well as there being a public and professional dimension to research within your own professional field, there is also a personal and private one too. It has become clear that the contribution to the development of personal skills and abilities that research brings cannot be underestimated and is demonstrated in the PDP that follows.
APPENDIX A

‘The SENCO role - support, training and development needs’

Information about the research project you are being invited to participate in.

You may be aware that in Wales we are seeking statutory reform in the area of children with additional learning needs (ALN).

In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government issued a consultation document, Inclusion and Pupil Support (2006). This document laid out the context for further developments in this field by re-iterating the legal definition of a Special Educational Need (SEN), whilst introducing a broader term, Additional Learning Needs (ALN). This definition identifies a number of additional groups of learners (including those with SEN), who may be vulnerable to underachievement in their education settings. This is a significant extension to the concept of groups identified as needing additional support, who are currently defined by statute.

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has made provision to enable the piloting of some key aspects of a potentially reformed framework. The pilot schemes cover four areas, one of which is the role of the ALN co-ordinator (ALNCO).

As part of this broader national pilot, I am undertaking a specific piece of research with secondary school practitioners. Based on the current role of Secondary SENCO, I am researching the current status of the role, and the factors that may influence the effectiveness of undertaking the role in the secondary school setting. The primary aim of this research is to investigate the current status of the SENCO role with secondary school practitioners, so that strategies for further development of the effectiveness of the role can be identified. This research will then be used to inform the broader project on the potential development of the role of the ALNCO.

As a secondary school SENCO working in __________________________ Local Authority, you are being invited to participate in this research. Initially, you will be asked to respond to a questionnaire. When analysed or reported on, this evidence will be made anonymous. All data will be securely stored on encrypted files. Some participants may also be invited to participate further through more detailed interviews over a timescale of the academic year 2010/11. This may result in some schools, with permission, being used as case study materials.

Participants may withdraw their involvement at any time.

To enable the research to take place, you are asked to complete the following permission form.

With thanks
Heather Duncan
CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Heather Duncan of the Department of Education at UWIC. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Committee at UWIC.

With full knowledge, I agree to participate in this study.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

□ YES □ NO

Participant Name: ____________________________ (Please print)

Participant Signature: __________________________

Witness Name: ____________________________ (Please print)

Witness Signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
Extracts from Interview 1
Case study school X

Respondent 1  Head teacher
Respondent 2  SENCo/ALNCo post holder
R  Researcher

1. When we appointed __________ we didn’t want to call it SENCo. I think it could be off putting for the children. So it was your decision to call it ALNCo wasn’t it? (turns to colleagues for agreement) (Colleague nods) ...because we wanted to do it. We have a situation where we have the learning needs but we then have the pastoral manager who looks after the behaviour...basically babysits in that area

R. Right

1. I think behaviour support is very much linked to learning support. Put them together. The new structure includes a Head of Inclusion that puts them together and covers both areas, um...what we do have is someone...________(names colleague) at the moment who is on the Leadership Team, that’s more down to ________ (names colleague) than it is down to the role of learning support, SENCo or that kind of thing.

R. So, in terms of where you currently are, not where you are leading to, where does this role relate to in terms of your current structure? Core head?

1. No, (turns to colleague for agreement), you’re an Assistant Head, Aren’t you?(colleague nods)

R. Just to talk about you __________ (Turns to SENCo/ALNCo) for a minute. How many years teaching experience do you have?

2. (quietly) Fifteen

R. (Encouragingly) that seems to be a feature of this area of work. You are people with considerable teaching experience. How long have you held this responsibility?

2. Last March, it would be about a year

R. Do you have any other qualifications either in management. Post graduate studies?

2. PGCE, that’s it

1. You’ve had training through the leadership course from the Local Authority, haven’t you?

2. Yeah

R. Middle management course?

2. Senior management

R. Lovely.... (Goes through the questionnaire with the SENCo/ALNCo) (Headteacher then explains the context for the school – interview for School Leaders Question 1)

1. When I first came, the SEN Register was ‘off the list’ because it wasn’t well managed.. if you didn’t have 20:20 vision you’d be on the SEN Register for wearing glasses! IEPs were through the roof (increasingly animated)... it was the tail wagging the dog. Where you’d say something was wrong to get more funding rather than
identifying the need.

R. Yes
1. I think literacy is a big problem for the school. I think it's parental engagement that's led to that problem...parental perception of education generally... most of our parents came to the school (gives the school's previous name)... they didn't get a good experience so to try and engage with the parents, get them to understand, has been a challenge...I think it's fair to say...

R. Either of you can answer this. What are the main responsibilities of the current post?
2. Looking at the teaching and learning for the students who are on the register and the provision, the extra provision they get....

R. That's very unusual, in fact you're the only person who has told me that teaching and learning is their first responsibility...
1. That is your BIG responsibility isn't it?
2. Yes, because the use of ... (names colleague) as an assistant, she takes up most of the time consuming tasks so that you are able to look at the bigger picture, looking at achievement through support, rather than having to be 'bogged down' with the support on a day to day basis.

R. So would it be fair to say you have someone doing the operational 'mechanics' of SENCo?
2. (Nods in agreement) apart from Annual Reviews, my job mainly is Annual Reviews and the use of IEPs... those things... monitoring the progress of pupils in particular subject areas ...things like liaising with outside agencies and bringing those provisions in ...
1. Yours is strategic...
2. Day to day TAs....timetables of the Teaching Assistants and the 'fixing of little Johnny who needs 2 hours of support' is done by my assistant.

R. Thanks, that's really helpful... What skills and competencies are important for this job?
1. When we advertised it, we said you had to be an outstanding teacher..... because it was a big issue for us as a school as it wasn't getting addressed. One of the recommendations from the 2009 inspection was that the staff in their planning would plan for the middle and not engage with less able children. That would then lead to disengagement and then lead to poor attendance from certain groups of children such as those with lower ability and learning difficulties. So teaching and the leadership potential and having that 'Vision' was certainly something we put you (turning to SENCo) 'through the mill' when we did it, when we interviewed. That's what stopped us appointing the first time. So that was crucial ... we talked about the ability to motivate and inspire for both students and staff. The relationships both staff and pupils and because it was an internal appointment, that ability to force and maintain relationships with adults and with children were key essentials... things that stood out for us.

R. Clearly that's been a positive appointment. In terms of having done the job for a year now are there any skills that you didn't expect that you would need?
2. No, not particularly...
R. What skills have you used the most?
2. Being (hesitates) ... I can’t think of the right word ... getting rid of conflict...people with strong views... being able to calm people down... being able to say, ‘In actual fact there is provision for your son/daughter and this is what is happening with that.’
R. So, more negotiating?
2. That’s the word, thank you!
1. I think it’s more the culture we live in. I can understand it... I’d rather have parents who fight for what they want rather than not care but... I think there’s certainly a culture in our school where the parents want the world on a stick and can’t see what has been put in place is above and beyond. What (names SENCo) is good at (and has pretty much undersold himself on) is negotiating and getting parents to see.... one of the things he does very well is a parent will come in very frustrated and leave knowing someone’s listened to them, not just listened, heard what is being said and get a positive outcome.
R. So, you’re telling me that currently it’s an Assistant Head. You’re going to restructure so just talk me through it...
1. The restructure... I can give you a copy before you leave... We’re going to have a Head of Inclusion...We’re moving to a Faculty basis... one of those faculties is going to be called ‘Progress and Wellbeing’. It will be a tier of leadership one below the Leadership Team, so there’ll be five Faculty Heads... Essentially it’s about here the Pastoral leads see their work as warm and cosy, in fact, it is about achievement..... The ‘Head of Achievement’ is going to be on the basis that every child has to be successful and what the reasons are if they are not being successful. (names some) The principle is that everyone needs to be involved in that we envisage that the person appointed to that could eventually be the Head of ‘Faculty. We’re going to retain a ‘named person’ on the Leadership Team who will have a named responsibility for that Faculty... It needs that strategic ‘push’, that top/down approach.
R. So, what would sit under that? Will there still be someone to do those operational mechanics?
1. No.
R. So how will that get done?
1. I think the reason that’s been a problem is that (names SENCo) has been busy kind of....effectively having taken over the role of curriculum deputy on a reduced timetable. To avoid that situation the person taking on that role wouldn’t have that whole school responsibility...
R. Do you think then that the role could be done by someone who wasn’t a teacher?
1. Yes.
R. Where do you think they would rank in terms of fitting into the learning and teaching agenda?
1. I think in terms of leading teaching and learning in an ideal world if we didn’t have a teacher leading on learning support I wouldn’t have it in the structure like that. Their work would be more operational then someone on the Leadership Team would take the lead.
R. ...and would that be a teacher?
1. That would definitely be a teacher!
R. (To SENCo) Do you believe that the duties identified in the current Code of Practice could/should be done by a teacher or non teacher?

2. I think they could be done by a non teacher.

R. What sort of status would that job need to have?

2. ... in what terms?

R. The Welsh Government is trying to determine whether the role could be done by a non teacher. What do you think?

2. I think they'd be able to undertake their duties but I don't think the status of a TA doing those things would be right. There are candidates with the skills... but I don't think a TA should be doing Annual Reviews etc

1. I think you could have a tier above HLTA.... because a colleague I worked with... one of the best SENCos I worked with...

R. What skills did they have?

1. Things that (names current SENCo) talked about but the ability to work with someone... I line managed her so she would come to me and tell me, 'you need to say this' or 'I need you to drive this in your capacity as Deputy Head...to say this is a key focus for us as a school'. (He summarises) That ability to understand her role in the context of the whole school and the people... No-one ever questioned that she was not (a teacher) but she had her own awareness of her ability to say 'It's not appropriate if I say that.'

R. That is interesting... it's about the skills.... For us as a project is it a person or a set of skills?

1. There aren't enough people coming forward to go into this specialist area. I think our TAs now, we've changed the culture in how we appoint. We appoint graduates who are interested in joining the teaching profession and use it a stepping stone rather than the cosy, old fashioned idea of a part time job. It is a profession in itself and a service in its own right. A part of our school community that adds significant value to the children in our care.

R. (To SENCo) What do you think the staff expect of the role of SENCo in the school?

2. (laughs) I think the expectation is that you'll sort out all the problems with ‘those’ students so that they can get on and teach! Whereas, in reality the role of SENCo is to give the staff the tools to be able to deal with those students and their challenging behaviour.

1. It varies on the teacher. We have some staff who are very ‘old school’ in thinking ‘they’re that type of child, let the SENCo deal with them’ whereas others say, ‘can you give me some ideas?’’. That’s why we talk about the importance of teaching and learning. I think a non teacher can understand the approaches to deal with an individual but I wouldn't be asking a non teacher o be giving advice on pedagogy. When we appointed (names SENCo) he had to be recognised as an excellent teacher. So that when (names SENCo) says, 'If you approach it this way' he has the credibility to say it.

R. That's really helpful. Now a question I am particularly interested in – How do you measure the effectiveness of the role of SENCo? How do you know you are doing a good job?

2. Well, the one measure is by doing yourself out of a job! Reducing the number of people who have those challenges. Making sure they are able to deal with what’s going on. Also making sure tracking
systems within the school help you track the progress of a specific group. Making sure they are making progress within certain lessons.

R. Lovely

2. Then what it does is it allows subject areas to not only look at the progress of the department but of particular groups (for example, EAL) so that they see, ‘Yes, we have a particular response to these groups, it’s not just the SENCo’s role or special needs area who have to look at it.’

1. For me, it’s about an individual achievement relative to their ability so every person in the school is responsible for achievement, Heads of Key Stage, Heads of Departments and (names SENCo). Each role is exactly the same. I would be saying, ‘How well have those groups of children achieved in relation to their potential?’ For me, school is about making sure each child achieves or exceeds their potential...

2. There’s an air of accountability then staff are then accountable for the progress of those children in their areas.

R. That is, I presume what helps you to ‘get the job done?’ – there is a culture now where they do take responsibility?

1 & 2 Yeah.....there’s no much choice!!

1. The staff have to deliver, the message I gave on the first day was you will get 100% support but I expect 100% effort every day that you are in. I think that if they underperform, someone will be there to find out why.

R. Having done the job for a year now (names SENCo). What helped you most to get the job done?

2. If I’m honest, having an assistant to do the day to day things, I know the structure is going to change but there will be someone on the Leadership Team looking at the strategic side of it... that’s one of the main things.

R. So it is about the ability to lead at that level?

2. (empathetically) Yes, absolutely...

R. Are there any other factors that impact on your ability to get the job done? Either positive or negative?

2. With regard to the school at the moment it’s the fact that I have responsibilities elsewhere, I have to be careful not to spread myself too thin. If people are SENCo on the Leadership Team and don’t have that operational person, I don’t think they’ll give the role justice.

R. Is there enough time to get the job done?

2. If you use the time that you have wisely.

R. Sounds like it’s the support that makes the difference?

2. Yes, it does.

1. I’d rather the SENCo not be a teacher as my concern is that (names SENCo) – you’re doing lots of other things..... In an ideal world I’d like to have an operational person who’s a non teacher... and someone who will oversee strategically...

R. I’m told your previous SENCo was good at the mechanics. There was a missing link of strategic...

1. I think the culture here was a ‘them and us’ teacher/non teacher which I’ve spent a lot of time to change. Saying to non teaching staff if you want to be seen as professional then the expectation will be that you will act as a professional in everything that you do. I think
you could have a TA take on the more day to day ...but it wouldn’t be appropriate to take on the strategic lead, which the previous incumbent attempted to do.

R. The next bit is to inform the Welsh Government. England has introduced a mandatory requirement for this role. Now you have (to SENCo) done the role for a year what should it include/ what areas of practice?

2. Conducting Annual Reviews....trigger points for when it’s appropriate to move up the stages... the requirements for a Statement... information about when it happens, requires you to act.  

R. Are there any sort of leadership things that you would benefit being in there?

2. The normal..Head of Department type things – how to lead a team, how to get the best out of people, achievement things like any other Head of Department...

1. I can think of some stuff from NPQH – setting vision statements and putting vision into practice, those things are crucial... understanding different types of leadership to manage both students and adults. That’s crucial. (To SENCo) You’re exposed to parents.... experience in that would be helpful.

R. I think what’s coming through is any mandatory training shouldn’t be looking at aspects of SEN but should be about...

2. (animated) How to run a department, manage reluctant staff, how to get people on side...

1. I think the role is more of a leader than knowledge of stuff. (To SENCo) I asked you why you didn’t go for the role in the first place and you said you didn’t have the ‘subject knowledge’ but I think the role is more of a leader, more than the ‘nuts and bolts’ – those things can be learned, can’t they?

R. Absolutely... You can’t teach someone how to inspire or negotiate. (Discussions continue on the broader inclusion agenda of learning with English as an additional language)

R. Do you believe a statutory change at a national level from SEN to ALN would be a helpful or positive move for schools?

1 & 2 Yes, it’s more inclusive.

1. I wouldn’t call it ALNCo....I try to avoid ‘SEN’ as I think it should be ‘inclusion’. The reason why we’ve chosen ‘inclusion’ is the philosophy behind it.

2. We’re getting to a stage now where parents would have been taught by a ‘SENCo’ and that would have had a negative aspect. The name does need to change because of the perception of the parents.

R. Yes. Definitely. SEN became a lifestyle!

1. The moment you call someone a ‘co-ordinator’, start ‘dumbing down’ the title. As soon as that happens, you’re a ‘co-ordinator’ not a leader. Well, it’s a bit like the ‘BTEc co-ordinator’ or ‘Head of Vocational Learning’...

R. So what will your title be in the new structure?

1. Head of Inclusion  

(Interview ends with conversation specific to the school.)
### Generic questionnaire for national pilot

#### Appendix D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Tick if your school has Qualified Teacher?</th>
<th>Details of SEN Qualifications</th>
<th>TLRs / Leadership Points / SEN Points?</th>
<th>Number of years / months in this role e.g. 4 years 5 months</th>
<th>FTE (Full Time Equivalent) - please see previous page for definition of FTE</th>
<th>% time allocated for this responsibility</th>
<th>% time spent on administration – please see previous page for definition of administration</th>
<th>Member of the SMT for this role?</th>
<th>Provides regular ALN / SEN reports to the SMT?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SENCo</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
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<td>Inclusion Manager</td>
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<td>ALNCo / AENCo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Duties – please complete for any other responsibilities that you have in relation to Additional Learning Needs e.g. LAC, Child Protection Officer, EAL, etc</td>
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#### Any additional comments / information
Guide to completion of the attached Matrix

- Please complete the name of your school. This will enable us to apply the details that we already hold of the numbers of total pupils, number of school Action Plus pupils and the number of statemented pupils at your school.

- Role – please tick which role you hold within your school.

- Qualified teacher – Please complete as applicable Yes or No.

- Details of SEN Qualifications – Please list any qualifications that you hold that are specific to ALN or SEN.

- TLRs / Leadership points / SEN points – Please provide details of these e.g. TLR 1, SEN 1, etc.

- Number of years / months in this role – Please express this in the following format, x years x months.

- FTE – Please state your FTE. An FTE of 1.0 means that you work as a full-time worker, while an FTE of 0.5 signals that you work half-time, etc.

- % time allocated for this responsibility – Please record the % of your time allocated specifically to ALN / SEN.

- % time spent on administration – Please record the % of your time spent on administrative tasks such as recording data on PLASC, arranging annual reviews, completing documentation for annual reviews, preparation of paperwork for LEA audits etc.

- Member of SMT for this role – If you are a member of the Senior Management Team in respect of your role as SENCo / ALNCo / AENCo etc please record as Yes.

- Provides regular ALN / SEN reports to SMT – Please record if you provide regular reports to the Senior Management Team in respect of ALN/ SEN.

- Other duties – please complete this section if you have other responsibilities in relation to Additional Learning Needs e.g. LAC, Child Protection Officer, EAL, etc

Any additional comments / information – please record any information that you consider would be helpful.

Questionnaire – The role of the Secondary Senco in Wales
The following questionnaire has been designed to identify the current status, experience and role of serving Senco staff in Wales. It is part of the data gathering to inform the statutory reform agenda.

**SCHOOL:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1 SCHOOL CONTEXT – STATUS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>+1</strong> In your school, how many roles cover the Senco duties and responsibilities?</td>
<td>(number)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> In your school, what title(s) is/are given to the role(s)?</td>
<td>(name them)</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong> For each role, what additional payment is allocated? (please only include those for whom the payment is for the Senco duties, rather than any other responsibility)</td>
<td>(identify the pay for each role eg. Senco TLR 1a / Inclusion manager Leadership 14)</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong> Are any of these roles fulfilled by a non teaching member of staff?</td>
<td>(yes/no)</td>
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<td>a.</td>
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<td><strong>5</strong> Does each job description have an identified whole school responsibility for SEN?</td>
<td>(yes or no)</td>
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<td>a.</td>
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<td><strong>6</strong> Does the role include being a member of SMT?</td>
<td>(yes/no)</td>
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<td><strong>7</strong> What other roles within the schools is the role on a par with? (‘on a par’ is defined in terms of financial payment)</td>
<td>(state similar status roles eg. Head of core subject, head of department, second in dept etc)</td>
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**Section 2**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EXPERIENCE and QUALIFICATION</strong></th>
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</table>
| 8 For each role, identify the years experience in SEN | (number of years fulfilling SEN duties) a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  |
| 9 Identify any additional SEN qualifications that post holders have achieved | (e.g. Diploma in SpLD, OCR, Masters) a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  |

**Section 3 ROLE and RESPONSIBILITIES**

| 10 In your school, does the role involve line management of staff? If yes, how many? | (yes/no Number ) a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  |
| 11 Does the role involve regular training/ professional development of others? (regular is defined as more than once a term) | (yes/no) a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  |
| 12 Does the role involve regular briefings to SMT? | (yes/no) a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  |

**Section 4 TIME ALLOCATION**

| 13 In your school, what is a main grade teacher expected to teach? | (number of sessions e.g. 42 out of 50 hours a fortnight) |
| 14 In your school, how much teaching of mainstream classes do staff with Senco duties undertake? | (identify for each role named in section 1 e.g. a. 20 lessons out of 50) a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  |
| 15 Of the non contact time available to the role (s), how much of it is spent in direct contact with individual/ small groups of pupils? | (sessions in a week/fortnight) a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  |
| 16 In your school, how much administration time is allocated to support the Senco duties? | (roughly what is the full time equivalent over the course of an academic year? E.g. Admin time over a year is about 0.5 of a scale 2 admin assistant/ 0.5 level 2 TA to support annual |
| 17 | During an academic year, How much time would the Senco role(s) spend on admin tasks? | (rough full time equivalent?) |
|    |                                                                                   | A.                       |
|    |                                                                                   | b.                       |
|    |                                                                                   | c.                       |
|    |                                                                                   | d.                       |

**Section 5 Additional information**

Please use this section to make any additional comments you feel would be of use to this study.
Baseline date collection – FINAL FORMAT
Role/duties of Secondary SENCo

1. What is the title given to the role that leads on this area of work in your school?

2. What renumeration is given to that role (e.g. leadership point/TLR/SEN points)

3. How many years teaching experience does the current post holder have?

4. How many years has the post holder held a responsibility post in this area?

5. What (if any) additional qualifications (in the field of SEN or management) does the post holder have?

6. Is this post holder a member of SMT because of their SEN responsibilities?
7. Does this post holder regularly (at least termly) report to the SMT?

8. If not on SMT what posts within the school is the postholder equivalent to? (e.g. Head of core subject/Head of year)

9. What is the post holders teaching commitment to timetabled lessons? (e.g. 20/50 14/25)

10. How many staff/roles does the post holder directly line manage?

11. Is regular administrative support time available and identified for the post holder – what amount?
12. Which of the following tasks does the post holder undertake? (Please tick)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Operational (hands on practice)</th>
<th>Strategic (setting direction for the whole school)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Induction of TAS</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Induction of teachers</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>NQT/EPD training</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Observing teaching</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Managing timetables</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Managing resources – finance</td>
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<td>staffing</td>
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<td>Assessment – individuals</td>
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<td>Assessment – groups</td>
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<td>Writing IEPs</td>
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<td>Making special arrangements</td>
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<td>Monitoring pupil progress</td>
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<td>Liaising with agencies</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>Training colleagues</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>Recruiting staff</td>
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13. Which 5 tasks (a-t) take up the majority of the post holder’s time?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

14. What additional responsibility posts/roles are identified in this area of work/department in your school?

a. 

b. 

c. 
15. For each additional role what renumeration is given?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

16. For each role, how many years teaching experience does the post holder have?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

17. What, if any, additional qualifications (in the field of SEN or management) do the post holders have?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

18. Are the additional post holders all qualified teachers?
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

19. What are the post holders teaching commitment to timetables lessons? (e.g. 20/50 14/25)
   a. 
   b. 
   c.
Additional comments

School:

Contact name:

Contact number:
## Data collection summary sheet - questionnaire responses

**Question:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
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**Conclusions**
Interview questions for school leaders*

- Please note the interviews are semi-structured so that interviews can give extended or broader answers to any questions asked. The following are, therefore, outline questions that form the basis of the interview.

1. Briefly outline the context of your school and its catchment (area).

2. Thinking particularly of the SENCo role, in this school:
   a. What main responsibilities does the post hold?
   b. What skills/competencies are important for the post holder to possess?
   c. Where does the post sit in the school structure?
   d. Is it important to you that the post is undertaken by a qualified teacher?

3. In this school, what do you believe the staff understand the role to be?

4. How does your school measure the effectiveness of this role?

5. Are there any factors that impact on the effectiveness of undertaking the role?

6. If there were a mandatory (statutory) requirement to hold an additional qualification for this role what do you think the course should cover?

7. Can you describe how your school currently manages the needs of learners identified with additional learning needs?

8. Do you believe a statutory change from SENCo to ALNCo (at a national level) would be a positive move?

9. What do you think the role of ALNCo would look like in your school?

10. Further comments?
National WAG Pilot D

Interview questions for serving SENCOs

- Please note the interviews follow up a semi structured questionnaire undertaken with the interviewer. Interviewees may identify areas to pursue as part of those responses therefore, these questions are outline questions that form the basis of the interview

1. In your school, as SENCo,
   a. What main responsibilities do you have?
   b. What skills/competencies do you think you need to possess?
   c. Could you fulfil the role if you were not a qualified teacher?
   d. What are the expectations of mainstream staff?

2. How do you measure your effectiveness in your role? How do you know you are doing a good job?

3. What helps you do the job more effectively?

4. What, if anything, sometimes had negative impact on your effectiveness?

5. If there were a national mandatory qualification to do the role, what do you think it should cover?

6. How does your school currently manage the needs of learners currently identified as having additional learning needs?

7. Do you believe a statutory change at a national level – from SENCO to ALNCO – would be a positive move?

8. What do you believe an ALNCo role would look like in your school?

9. Further comments?
APPENDIX J

CODED Extracts from Interview 1
Case study school X

Respondent 1  Head teacher
Respondent 2  SENCo/ALNCo post holder
R  Researcher

1. When we appointed __________ we didn’t want to call it SENCo. I think it could be off putting for the children. So it was your decision to call it ALNCo wasn’t it? (turns to colleagues for agreement) (RELATIONSHIPS)
(Colleague nods)
...because we wanted to do it. We have a situation where we have the learning needs but we then have the pastoral manager who looks after the behaviour...basically babysits in that area (EXPECTATIONS)

R. Right
1. I think behaviour support is very much linked to learning support. Put them together. The new structure includes a Head of Inclusion that puts them together and covers both areas, um...what we do have is someone...__________ (names colleague) at the moment who is on the Leadership Team, that’s more down to __________(names colleague) than it is down to the role of learning support, SENCo or that kind of thing... (PERSONAL SKILLS)

R. So, in terms of where you currently are, not where you are leading to, where does this role relate to in terms of your current structure? Core Head?
1. No, (turns to colleague for agreement), you’re an Assistant Head, Aren’t you? (colleague nods) (CLARITY of COMMUNICATION)

R. Just to talk about you __________ (Turns to SENCo/ALNCo) for a minute. How many years teaching experience do you have?
2. (quietly) fifteen

R. (encouragingly) that seems to be a feature of this area of work. You are people with considerable teaching experience. How long have you held this responsibility?
2. Last March, it would be about a year

R. Do you have any other qualifications either in management. Post graduate studies?
2. PGCE, that’s it (PROFESSIONAL SKILLS)
1. You’ve had training through the leadership course from the Local Authority, haven’t you?
2. Yeah

R. Middle management course?
2. Senior management (PROFESSIONAL SKILLS)
R. Lovely...(Goes through the questionnaire with the SENCo/ALNCo)
(Headteacher then explains the context for the school – interview for School Leaders Question 1)

1. When I first came, the SEN Register was ‘off the list’ because it wasn’t well managed.. if you didn’t have 20:20 vision you’d be on
the SEN Register for wearing glasses! IEPs were through the roof (increasingly animated)... it was the tail wagging the dog. Where you’d say something was wrong to get more funding rather than identifying the need. (EXPECTATIONS)

R. Yes
1. I think literacy is a big problem for the school. I think it’s parental engagement that’s led to that problem...parental perception of education generally... most of our parents came to the school (gives the school’s previous name)... they didn’t get a good experience so to try and engage with the parents, get them to understand, has been a challenge....I think it’s fair to say...(EXPECTATIONS)

R. Either of you can answer this. What are the main responsibilities of the current post?
2. Looking at the teaching and learning for the students who are on the register and the provision, the extra provision they get....(PROFESSIONAL SKILLS)

R. That’s very unusual, in fact you’re the only person who has told me that teaching and learning is their first responsibility...
1. That is your BIG responsibility isn’t it?(EXPECTATIONS)
2. Yes, because the use of ... (names colleague) as an assistant, she takes up most of the time consuming tasks so that you are able to look at the bigger picture, looking at achievement through support, rather than having to be ‘bogged down’ with the support on a day to day basis.(EXPECTATIONS)

R. So would it be fair to say you have someone doing the operational ‘mechanics’ of SENCo?
2. (Nods in agreement) apart from Annual Reviews, my job mainly is Annual Reviews and the use of IEPs... those things... monitoring the progress of pupils in particular subject areas ...things like liaising with outside agencies and bringing those provisions in...
1. Yours is strategic...
2. Day to day TAs....timetables of the Teaching Assistants and the ‘fixing of little Johnny who needs 2 hours of support’ is done by my assistant.

R. Thanks, that’s really helpful... What skills and competencies are important for this job?
1. When we advertised it, we said you had to be an outstanding teacher...because it was a big issue for us as a school as it wasn’t getting addressed. One of the recommendations from the 2009 inspection was that the staff in their planning would plan for the middle and not engage with less able children. That would then lead to disengagement and then lead to poor attendance from certain groups of children such as those with lower ability and learning difficulties. So teaching and the leadership potential and having that ‘Vision’ was certainly something we put you (turning to SENCo) ‘through the mill’ when we did it, when we interviewed. That’s what stopped us appointing the first time. So that was crucial ... we talked about the ability to motivate and inspire for both students and staff. The relationships both staff and pupils and because it was an internal appointment, that ability to force and maintain relationships with adults and with children were key
essentials... things that stood out for us. (PROFESSIONAL and PERSONAL SKILLS)

R. Clearly that’s been a positive appointment. In terms of having done the job for a year now are there any skills that you didn’t expect that you would need?

2. No, not particularly...

R. What skills have you used the most?

2. Being (hesitates) ... I can’t think of the right word ... getting rid of conflict...people with strong views... being able to calm people down... being able to say, ‘In actual fact there is provision for your son/daughter and this is what is happening with that.’ (SKILLS)

R. So, more negotiating?

2. That’s the word, thank you!

1. I think it’s more the culture we live in. I can understand it... I’d rather have parents who fight for what they want rather than not care but... I think there’s certainly a culture in our school where the parents want the world on a stick and can’t see what has been put in place is above and beyond. What (names SENCo) is good at (and has pretty much undersold himself on) is negotiating and getting parents to see.... one of the things he does very well is a parent will come in very frustrated and leave knowing someone’s listened to them, not just listened, heard what is being said and get a positive outcome. (SKILLS)

R. So, you’re telling me that currently it’s an Assistant Head. You’re going to restructure so just talk me through it...

1. The restructure... I can give you a copy before you leave... We’re going to have a Head of Inclusion...We’re moving to a Faculty basis... one of those faculties is going to be called ‘Progress and Wellbeing’. It will be a tier of leadership one below the Leadership Team, so there’ll be five Faculty Heads... Essentially it’s about here the Pastoral leads see their work as warm and cosy, in fact, it is about achievement..... The ‘Head of Achievement’ is going to be on the basis that every child has to be successful and what the reasons are if they are not being successful. (names some) The principle is that everyone needs to be involved in that we envisage that the person appointed to that could eventually be the Head of Faculty. We’re going to retain a ‘named person’ on the Leadership Team who will have a named responsibility for that Faculty... It needs that strategic ‘push’, that top/down approach. (CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION)
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# Professional Doctorate Programme

## Professional Development Portfolio (PDP)

Heather Duncan

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Background to the PDP</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>• Introduction</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>• Initial actions</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>• Personal reflections</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Becoming a researcher</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>• Developing the skills and abilities to become a researcher:</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>• Research skills: personal</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The progress of the research</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>• Professional activities to support the progression of the research</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>• Professional networks/conferences</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>• Developing a shared terminology</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>• Peer review</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>• Other professional networks</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The results of the research activities</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>• Self evaluation audit tool</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>• Proposed professional standards</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>Mind your language discussion paper</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>Summary – Terminology document</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4</td>
<td>Self evaluation audit tool</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5</td>
<td>National standards – proposed</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td></td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 1. Background to undertaking the PDP

1.1 Introduction

In the Autumn Term of 2008, I attended a breakfast meeting at UWIC in Colchester Avenue. I was invited because, as ‘Head of Achievement’ for the Education Service in a large local authority, one of my responsibilities was professional development. The subject of the briefing was ‘Continuing Professional Development’ (CPD), with a particular focus on the Professional Doctorate programme.

Having achieved a Master’s Degree in the Management of Special Education over a decade earlier, the attraction of a ‘practice based’ higher qualification generated an interest that wouldn’t go away.

Deciding to enrol on the professional doctorate programme coincided with my professional participation in a large pilot project commissioned by the Welsh Government (WG formerly known as the Welsh Assembly Government). With support from my employers, the opportunity to develop some relevant research to complement my professional role of supporting secondary practitioners began to emerge. The focus for the pilot project was on identifying the potential role of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) in preparation for planned statutory changes in this field of educational practice. The reality was that, having a regular professional engagement with people undertaking the role of secondary Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), and, having undertaken the role for a considerable amount of my professional career, I believed that developing the potential role of ALNCo was hard to do without first gaining a clearer understanding of the current practice in relation to the secondary SENCo role.

My own personal professional involvement with SEN had begun five years into my career, when I had been appointed as SENCo in a large inner city comprehensive in Birmingham. Having undertaken the role of secondary school SENCo for over 15 years, and in a variety of settings, I had personal experience of the difficulties current practitioners were identifying in their
work. A lack of whole school systems, particularly on the monitoring of standards for SEN learners, had often left me frustrated. Staff sometimes acted as if supporting any requests from my department was doing me a personal favour. I had rarely experienced real clarity from a senior manager on the remit and responsibilities of the role. Consequently, I felt a personal and professional responsibility to ensure that any changes in the statutory framework led to better and clearer statutes governing what I felt to be a crucial aspect of the education system.

It wasn’t long before the research idea and the professional project activities began to appear both mutually supportive, and personally, and professionally, beneficial. It appeared to provide an opportunity to support the broader project in relation to the development of a potential framework for the role of secondary ALNCo, through providing an evidence base regarding current secondary practice in relation to the secondary SENCo role.

As the broader WG project was initiated to inform statutory change proposed for 2013, this provided a workable time frame for the development of this research.

1.2 Initial actions

From the outset, the research was clearly linked to my professional role as Head of Achievement for the Local Education Service and to the broader WG project in particular. The difficulty in the initial stages of planning the research was ensuring that my work could be seen as separate from the broader WG pilot, where I was lead officer for the Local Authority.

It was important to be clear where my research would begin and end. It was also clear that the role of SENCo was broad across the different sectors in education. I quickly identified that the focus for my research should be narrowed to the secondary phase. At the first review meeting (in 2009) with both my Director of Studies and my second supervisor, it was clear that I had not persuaded them that I was clear where the lines of demarcation were between what I was proposing to do, and what I was undertaking in my
professional role for the Welsh Government project. Their professional challenge caused me to reflect on making the project framework clearer.

The broader pilot project being undertaken for the Welsh Government appointed a Project Manager working for the two Local Authorities involved in the pilot. Almost immediately he began to fulfil the role of ‘critical friend’. Being outside of education his questioning soon prompted me to be able to clarify what I needed to achieve. This was through a process of questioning with a clear focus on what outcomes I was trying to achieve, rather than what activity I wanted to undertake. That was the most difficult, but most useful lesson learned.

The aim of the broader project was to investigate the potential role of the ALNCo, and propose any mandatory framework that would be recommended to support the role. This involved researching practice in the rest of the UK, particularly the statutory framework already in place in England. Inevitably, undertaking this work also supported the development of my own professional knowledge in relation to my research.

To enable a clearer demarcation between my research and that of the broad pilot project, my research project was quickly identified as a separate strand called ‘The secondary research strand’, within the reporting arrangements in the WG project. As my research was forming part of the evidence base for progress within the broader project it was inextricably linked to the direction of travel for the broader project, but could still be identified as a separate activity in order to maintain the academic rigour needed for post graduate work. It was going to be important to identify the impact of my research as separate to the progress of the broader project which had clear and agreed outcome measures of its own.

For reporting and monitoring purposes, I regularly updated identified groups in the WG project group on the progress of my personal research but needed to develop and identify research objectives that could provide a robust framework for monitoring the progress of my research.
1.3 Personal reflections

On reflection, it was inexperience in academic research that made the initial development of the research process more complicated than it needed to be. The need to be able to ensure rigour for the model was not wrong, but without a project management or research background, I initially found it hard to identify how my aims and objectives could be separated from those commissioned by WG for the broader project.

Although the thesis described the strong professional network that developed and offered me outstanding support, it was a combination of the workplace and academic challenge that both helped to clarify the research question, and ensured the research process was well thought through. This will be further explored later.

It is often only in retrospect that you can truly appreciate your own personal development of skills and attributes. At the beginning of the process I could never have seen quite how much of a professional and personal journey this would become.
Section 2. Becoming a researcher

2.1 Developing the skills and abilities to become a researcher

The intention from the start of this research was for it to ensure there was a robust evidence base on the current role of secondary SENCo prior to the WG changing the legislative framework for this aspect of educational practice. The interest in taking the approach of a professional doctorate, as opposed to a PhD, was the opportunity to contribute to the development of professional practice, as much as professional knowledge. The website for the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) identifies that students who are participating in a professional doctorate are expected to:

*Make a contribution to both theory and practice in their field, and to develop professional practice by making a contribution to (professional) knowledge.*

*(current ESRC website home page)*

The clear intention with this research was to investigate the secondary SENCo role from the perspective of the practitioners and their colleagues.

The skills and abilities needed to become a good researcher were not known to me at the start of the process. For the first activity expected within the professional doctorate framework, ‘Contextualising professional Change’, the learning was immense. This extract from the initial paper illustrates how basic my starting point was. I had to learn how to ask the right questions.
Initial Research Questions and Objectives

Saunders et al. (2003) stress the importance of clearly defining the research questions at the beginning of the research process. They identify that one of the clear success criteria for the research is whether you have sufficient evidence to draw conclusions. They argue that this will be largely determined by the clarity of the research questions.

They identify the pitfall of asking research questions that will not generate new insights, or that of making proposals that are not achievable? They recommend that the researcher start with general focus research questions which may then lead to several more detailed questions, and the definition of research objectives. Saunders et al. (2003) reassure the researcher that the research objectives are likely to lead to greater specificity than the initial research questions.

27th April 2009

The identification of the research objectives helped clarify what the research was really trying to focus in on to achieve the research aim. The ability to be able to regularly come back to the objectives made sure that the research was kept on track.

On reflecting on the progress I have made in research skills and abilities, a useful reference point is the recently developed Research Development Framework (2010). The RDF is a professional development framework for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers. It identifies the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers and encourages them to realise their potential through relating their progress against identified descriptors. These cover the knowledge, intellectual abilities, techniques and professional standards needed to do research. The framework also articulates the personal qualities, knowledge and skills needed to work with others and ensure the wider impact of research.
Progress in my subject knowledge can be clearly mapped. What started with a secure understanding of my own professional field developed into a detailed and thorough knowledge and understanding of my own, and related, areas of study. This is particularly true in respect of the knowledge base concerning change management.

2.2 Research skills - personal

Although working full time, the opportunity to participate in research skills training and development activities was extremely valuable. Some sessions were delivered by nationally recognised ‘experts’, but the most useful were those closer to home where the focus could be on learning together, or in small groups.

What was of particular help was an initial session delivered during the three day start to the professional doctorate programme (Contextualising Professional Change) called Reflective practice: What? Why? How? Almost inevitably, it was only when progressing with the research itself that the benefits of such sessions became truly apparent.

Whilst academic supervision was hugely helpful, in the early stages, without the confidence of being a seasoned researcher, it was not always easy to know where to develop the research. An example of this was the exploration of the research approach ‘appreciative enquiry’.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a methodology that has grown in popularity in recent years. It was suggested as a line of enquiry in a supervision meeting. AI has established itself as a growing practice that builds on the work of the likes of Kurt Lewin in building on practical theories. The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook (2007: vi) confirms the core principles of AI to be that of changing attitudes, behaviours, and practices through appreciative conversations and relationships – interactions designed to bring out the best in people so that they can imagine a preferred future together that is more ‘hopeful, boundless, and inherently good.’
Cooperrider and Whitney (2007: x) are keen to clarify that AI as a methodology is more about learning and understanding something – what they call the ‘affirmative topic’- in order to value it, rather than merely appreciate it. Their work cites Drucker,

*The ageless essence of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system’s weaknesses irrelevant.*

There is a growing field committing to the AI research approach. Its metacognitive approach extends the Lewinian concept that human action depends upon the world as constructed, to help people design and redesign systems within organisations for a more effective future. AI can be seen as a form of transformational inquiry, based on the belief that human systems are designed, and best improved, by those living and working within them. AI presents a philosophy – a process called the 4D cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny – for engaging people to produce effective and positive change.

Whilst it was clear that AI could make an effective contribution to people within an organisation who could pull together towards a common vision and a shared common purpose, it was a methodology that, once explored, did not feel appropriate to the developing research process. Only as confidence as a researcher developed, was there was an ability to honestly and critically evaluate whether the approach brought anything to this research. Although useful professionally, implementing this approach into the research went no further. Deciding what to ‘cut’ from the process became as important as deciding what to pursue.

What was of great use was university organised ‘round table’ events. These were lunch time sessions for post graduate colleagues to meet together to explore issues in their developing research. As opportunities to attend such sessions developed, so too did the confidence to contribute to developing discussions.
A significant area of personal growth was that relating to subject knowledge about research methodologies. This was true of both theoretical knowledge and practical applications. Examining methodological and ontological approaches through the modular approach to the doctorate enabled a developing understanding of the breadth of research opportunities within the field of education.

In relation to the development of skills, the best approach to illustrate my growth in this area is to quote from my personal journal:

**An extract from my personal journal**

*I have always been a ‘need to know’ learner – that suits me best! I need a particular skill – I try and learn it. I have never been good at the abstract – I have to be able to practise and apply it if I’m going to really embed the learning.***

At the start of this journey, I would have described my IT as adequate to good – but I have had an incredible opportunity to learn and develop skills.

My first visit to the library was one of the most intimidating experiences of my life! Here was I – a mature, competent professional in a massive room of adolescents where I wasn’t sure if I could get on the system – let alone find what I needed! Library staff were incredibly helpful – patiently helping me to research books, journals and articles – suddenly, and quite literally, the world appeared to open up to me.

**June 2009**

After attending workshops in using applications such as ‘endnote’ and spending endless hours in the library and online, the confidence and skills researching has given me to find papers, articles, books and notes is immeasurable.
An extract from my personal journal

Bill has recommended some more recent articles on mixed methods approach to research. Went onto the UWIC staff portal and accessed all of them within minutes. I stored them on my pen stick ready to edit tonight.

Reminded myself about that initial trip to the library in Cyncoed – had to physically go there as I couldn’t access the IT system! Now, nearing the end of this research, I realised that I had developed skills I didn’t EVER expect to be so confident in relating to using and applying information technology.

May 2012

At the beginning of the professional doctorate programme, the first opportunity to present to peers came in the ‘Managing Professional Change’ module. Out of my ‘comfort zone’ for the first time in years, journal entries record the sheer fear of potentially ‘getting it wrong’ in front of peers. The cohort for the professional doctorate programme were almost entirely people who worked in higher education and, although I was someone who had worked in education for over 20 years, it felt like I was the only one who didn’t understand the rules.

It was not the challenge of presenting to a group of peers - that was an activity I was used to professionally. The real challenge was feeling I was in the unfamiliar world of ‘academia’, and, as such, uncertain of all the language, processes and ‘tricks’ that academics were certain to know.

Looking back, I believe I started at a basic research skill level in my understanding of my knowledge and skills. They developed over time through to a more robust ability to be confident when challenged and willing, and able, to justify my own view and the position of the research. Most notable is the growth in relation to self reflection.
Professionally, I was used to developing ‘reflective practice’ with teachers, particularly in looking at teaching and learning strategies, however, the initial workshop called ‘Reflective practice: What? Why? How?’ opened up the concept of reflective practice in relation to research.

Using the stimulus of a reference to the work of Hammersley (2002), the challenge to new researchers was made in suggesting that meaning is not ‘out there’ waiting to be ‘scooped up’ as it is constructed through acts of interpretation. It was a reminder to the researcher that, depending on what you focus on, will be what you see. It suggested that if you allow research to change you it can become ‘transformative’ as ‘reflecting’ is not simply ‘thinking’ - it should be a process that critically analyses progress so that a new perspective can be reached. Thus the creation of the doctorate journals became a central part of the learning process.

At key points in the research, reflecting on the progress of the research helped shape and refine the research process. Of note was the stage after the collection of the data via the questionnaire. So much evidence had been collected that the research appeared to be ‘flowing’ - the first case study interviews were quickly arranged.

As the thesis outlines in the research process section, having undertaken a first pilot interview rigorously and professionally using audio files on a digital tape recorder, it was a surprise that evening, whilst beginning to write up the interview, when it became clear that the questions were ‘leading’ the subjects far more than I imagined. I appeared to ‘know’ the answers I expected. It also appeared that I feared silence and was too keen to prompt answers before people had been given sufficient thinking time. The interview was carefully transcribed, annotated and stored securely (electronically) but more time was spent going back to developing questions that addressed the research question, in a way which avoided ‘leading’ the interviewee.

As already identified, it was always going to be important to be clear where the research began and ended in relation to the broader WG pilot project as early on in the research, it was clear that, as this research was inextricably
linked to a broader Welsh Government project the issue of ‘attribution and co-authorship’ needed to be clearly defined to ensure there was rigour to the research.

The broader pilot projects were supporting the WG in managing statutory change in relation to changing the framework for supporting learners with SEN. This research provided the opportunity to investigate the management of educational change more broadly, and the impact that has on secondary school SEN practice, in particular.

The next section will illustrate the extent to which the professional and academic support helped develop the necessary research skills to meet the requirements of this expectation.
Section 3. The progression of the research

3.1 Professional activities to support the progression of the research

The confidence to develop into a ‘researcher’ did not come overnight. Supervision helped. So did the Literature review module, which provided the opportunity to revisit the purpose of what the aim and objectives of the study were.

What enabled the development of the role of researcher was the combination of continuing professional development offered through the university and participation in a number of strong professional networks.

3.2 Professional networks and conferences

Professionally, I was a member of The Association of Directors for Education in Wales group (ADEW). This manages the interface between the 22 Local Authorities in Wales and works directly with Welsh Government on all aspects of practice in education. ADEW has a number of subgroups. The SEN group has representatives from each of the 22 Local Authorities. Although often operating under different titles, these meetings involved colleagues undertaking comparable roles, and provided a regular opportunity to discuss the changing national landscape. Seven of the peer group were also directly involved in various pilot projects for the Welsh Government, so relationships were familiar, yet strong enough to be challenging. This was the obvious group to use to develop professional ideas in the developing research.

The **Lead Officers Group (Executive Group)** consisted of the Project Manager, the Lead Officer for our partner Local Authority in the pilot, and me. Meeting monthly, with the focus on monitoring the progress of the broader project, this inevitably also became the focus of much of the peer review of the development of the research study that took place. An example of this, in relation to the use of terminology relating to special and additional needs, is as follows:
3.3 Developing a shared terminology

Having determined how the research would fit into the broader project, I identified a clear need to ensure that there was some agreement concerning the use of terminology. It was of concern to practitioners that the term ‘ALNCo’ was being used in WG documentation as an accepted, or proposed role, without there being a clear nationally agreed definition.

Appendix 1 is a paper written by the researcher, ‘Mind your language’ (2010) which was presented to the Statutory Reform Group in January 2010. This is a national body, consisting of representation from all statutory agencies as well as many voluntary agencies active in the field of special educational needs. Their role is support the process of any potential statutory change in this area.

Reporting to this body began a process to raise awareness of the need to ensure that there was clarity to the terminology being used. Although met with a positive response from these professional representatives from across the 22 Local Authorities in Wales, representatives did not feel that they were in a position to confirm it as the national definition at that time. In his work, Hart (1998:1) suggests that,

*The review is, therefore, a part of your academic development – of becoming an expert in your field.*

Appendix 2 is a summary document that was shared at the national Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) conference in North Wales in late March 2010, to begin to secure national agreement on the terminology in this area of work. The researcher presented four workshops to all 21 other Local Authority lead officers. The workshop consisted of a power point presentation on the difficulties with the current terminology. This facilitated a national debate as to the current position of SEN and ALN. The paper was shared and then accepted by the 22 Local Authorities as an explanation of the term ‘Additional Learning Needs’ (ALN), agreeing that this was not a label to attach to vulnerable learners but was, rather:
A guide for educationalists on those groups of learners for whom processes need to be established. This is in order to ensure that their performance is monitored closely, and their achievement is fully supported.

As this definition was asking for acceptance at a national level, then developing support, processes or professional development for the role of the ‘ALNCo’ could, and should, be based on evidence from existing good practice in relation to the current role of SENCo – for pupils with SEN are a clearly identified group of vulnerable learners for whom a statutory framework currently exists.

3.4. Peer review

In his role as ‘critical friend’ the Project Manager produced a peer review (Appendix 3). This does not need to be anonymised as his contribution to the progress of the research has already been acknowledged in the thesis.

The difficulty I identified in the field was a lack of clarity between those with a clearly defined need that impacted on their ability to learn in the mainstream context, as opposed to those who are potentially vulnerable to underachievement because they belong to a group that evidence would suggest are likely to face increased barriers to learning. For example, a special educational need such as Autism is an identified difficulty that impacts on learning, whereas being a learner who speaks English as a second language is an identified additional need that may make you vulnerable to underachievement.

The purpose of the paper was to prompt national debate so that this confusion could be addressed. This was accepted by ADEW as clarification of what was needed nationally. When presented to the Statutory Reform Group, the forum that had commissioned the WG pilots (21st April 2010), it was clearly the first time that the group had acknowledged the difficulties that such confusion was causing in the field.
Receiving such positive feedback from ADEW was the first time I realised that the research I was undertaking could make a significant contribution to the development of the national agenda. The fact that there had not been a level of national discussion based on listening to the views of practitioners was the first awareness that practice and theory needed to be more closely aligned if ‘good’ laws were to be created. Secondary peers had not been given the opportunity by national government to be systematically listened to, or asked to evaluate the issues facing them as practitioners in the field to help inform policy.

3.3 Other professional networks

The broader Project Management Board agreed to meet every two months. The range of stakeholders ensured that there was a level of challenge for the lead officers that enabled clearer thinking and an opportunity to discuss and justify actions within the broader project. With representation from statutory and voluntary partners their interest in improving this area of work was unquestionable. The minutes from this group (made available in regular updates to the Welsh Government) confirm a requirement for regular updates on the secondary research strand, and challenge to outcomes that were reported along the way.

Although the minutes are confidential, an example of this was in relation to the data collated in the original questionnaire undertaken with all secondary SENCos across the two Local Authorities. When I showed them what the initial analysis of the data was indicating, the quality of their questions helped shape questions that were later used in the case study settings.

The role of the Professional Reference Group cannot be underestimated. Chosen to represent good practitioners in the field across primary, secondary and local government, this group met regularly to be the ‘critical friend’ for the broader project. It was this group that initially tested the first questionnaires for this research. They volunteered their time and expertise based on a genuine desire to support the development of a better statutory framework. The minutes (kept by the broader WG project) record a number of
opportunities, in words and photographs, when I facilitated meetings to get engagement and feedback from leaders in the field. Their feedback shaped the refinement of the questionnaire format.

Similarly, the Secondary SENCo Forum - a professional network that has existed in my Local Authority for over a decade – was an invaluable professional network. Meetings took place on a termly basis, where detailed minutes were always taken. (These cannot be included in the appendices as they contain evidence that cannot be anonymised.) Members of the forum were made aware of the national context at the start of the project, and were given regular updates on both the secondary strand, and the broader project itself. They were the ‘critical friends’ who tested the various drafts of the questionnaires in the academic year 2010/11 and many of the professionals who were involved in the more extensive case studies. Their overwhelming response was that they were pleased to have the opportunity to participate in a study that was based on listening to practitioners in the field.

As the research results were identifying the need for clarification as to the role and expectation on the role of secondary SENCo, it was these two professional groups that enable the project to develop the self evaluation tool extracts of which are in APPENDIX 4.
Section 4. The results of the research activity

The most significant area that a professional doctorate should reference itself against is that of the influence and impact that the research has made. The key question for a professional doctorate has to be – How has this work made a contribution to changing practice? This can only really be measured in any known and available measurable professional outcomes.

4.1 Self evaluation audit tool

Identified as one of the ‘outputs’ of the broader project, the self evaluation audit tool is a good example of the clear link between the project and this research. Unlike other audit tools for the area of ‘SEN’ or ‘ALN’ the first aspect of this self evaluation tool relates to the impact that the role has had on learner outcomes. Although it has a clear section on provision, the most extensive section of the tool relates to that of the issues of leadership and management, it is this clear focus on the role being one of leader and manager, rather than teacher and practitioner that was informed by the results of this research. The tool was developed by sessions I facilitated with the Reference Group over a series of meetings. It would not have developed in the way it did, had my research not been clear that the tool should not focus on provision for SEN, but the Leadership and Management of SEN.

Although the self evaluation audit tool has already been identified as a significant professional outcome recommended to the Welsh Government, it is not the only one. A significant focus for the broader project was examining the changes in other parts of the United Kingdom towards this complex agenda.

A visit to Northern Ireland in October 2010 to meet with education leaders identified the complexities for their governance. The political divide aside, they faced the same issues as Wales and England in trying to broaden ‘SEN’ to encompass the more vulnerable groups of learners, but had made no further progress as to how best to move the agenda forward.
4.2 Proposed professional standards

As identified in the thesis, the statutory framework in England had already changed with there being a mandatory requirement for the SENCo role to be undertaken by a qualified teacher. The requirement was also for those new to role having to undertake a mandatory qualification. A visit to one of the approved training providers in England by me and the project manager facilitated a professional debate with the designers of the qualification framework that enabled our project to develop a framework that was felt best to propose to the Welsh Government.

Appendix 5 is a copy of the project proposal to the Welsh Government regarding mandatory training. It must be clearly stated that this is an output of the broader pilot project. The appendix however outlines the ‘Development of the specification for nationally approved training for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo) leading to the award of the National Award for SEN Coordination Wales that would not have been achieved without the evidence gathered through my research into the current role of secondary SENCo.

The recommendations to the Welsh Government, as a result of the project and this research, start with a robust self evaluation undertaken by the practitioner which then builds a bespoke, and personalised, training programme that has a focus on leadership and management skills through an action research, setting based, learning approach. Without the results of my research, the broader project would not have had the evidence from practitioners and settings that this was the most effective approach to take to address the requirements in the field.

Seen as key to supporting the role of secondary SENCo/ALNCo, there is a clear need for a professional framework for good quality, and appropriate, training, however, it is important to note that the research conclusions did offer the reminder that there is no evidence that training alone will ensure that outcomes for learners with additional or special needs will necessarily improve as a consequence of participation in training. What is important is
that the training programme allows practitioners to explore their role to secure a clear understanding of how they should develop it.

What is an equally important research outcome is the proposal that Welsh Government do not solely focus on the training and development needs of the SENCo or ALNCo practitioner. A strong recommendation to Welsh Government, through the project framework, has been the need to ensure that head teachers, in their role as principle lead for school improvement in each setting, are sufficiently trained to ensure they undertake this key role well. The research recommends that a focus on this may have considerably more impact on individual institutions that any policy change may think it is having.
Section 5. Conclusions

Hammersley (2002:15) offered an explanation of the purpose of undertaking research by proposing:

Rather than supplying or validating effective techniques or policies, the payoff of research is now more widely believed to lie more in terms of raising questions about current assumptions, and of supplying alternative perspectives on the work of teachers, education managers and policy makers, and on the context in which they operate.

He concurs with a number of researchers in the field of social science in suggesting that research is a practical activity, one that the researcher will not always be able to control. However, the most practical of research is still primarily concerned with the production of sound knowledge, but Hammersley (2002:66) reminds us that:

It follows a trajectory that is not under the control of the researcher, deviation from what is expected frequently occurs and has to be made sense of. Initial understanding of the problem may need to be changed quite dramatically at the very least, complicating factors will have to be recognised, and along with this, considerable degrees of contingency acknowledged.

The professional doctorate appealed to me because it was rooted in practice. As the research developed, it became clear that the more the researcher allows the process of the research to develop in relation to a robust examination of the current knowledge base, the more reliable and credible the research is likely to be.

The pertinent question to a professional doctorate relates to the potential impact on professional practice the research has had.

To return to the challenge of the definition of a successful professional doctorate quoted at the beginning, according to the EHRC, I believe that this research, and the broader pilot project it related to, has made a significant contribution to the theory and practice of secondary SEN in Wales. As Lead
Officer for the broader WG pilot project that produced Appendices 4 and 5, they could not have been developed without the active engagement of the secondary SENCo practitioners who contributed to my research. The evidence of this research has helped shape the recommendations being made to Welsh Government in this complex area of practice and has been based on listening to practitioners and evaluating their work within the context of individual institutions. It is the first evidence base created by analysing the current practice of practitioners who have been working under the Code of Practice for over ten years. It has also extended to beyond the subjective views of these participants to ensure that data collected through the research can be validated by data provided from outside of their own personal view.

For me as a researcher the question I have asked myself is, ‘If I were doing the research again - would I do the whole process in the same way?’ Almost inevitably, there are many things I would do differently such as how I organised the vast amounts of learning there was whilst undertaking the Literature Review. If I had been more seasoned as a researcher, I would also have been quicker to challenge suggestions in the early meetings with my supervisors, I was altogether too passive in expressing how I wanted the research to develop. I also expended a great deal of energy at the start of the research being so concerned with the lines of demarcation between the broader pilot, and my research. In summary, at the start I didn’t appreciate that getting things ‘wrong’ was not a waste of time, but an opportunity to learn and develop.

Although at some points things were often frustrating, I know now that, thanks to the participation of a vast number of practitioners, colleagues and friends, we now have a clearer picture and more robust evidence base on the current practice, needs and issues facing practitioners working in the field of special educational needs in Wales.
Appendix 1

Mind your Language!
A discussion paper

Heather Duncan
January 2010
‘A very great part of the mischiefs that vex this world arises from words’

Edmund Burke

‘Language is not only the vehicle of thought, it is a great and efficient instrument in thinking’

Sir H Davy

‘Change your language and you change your thoughts’

Karl Albrecht

‘If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone;...hence there can be no arbitrariness in what is said. This matters above everything.’

Confucius

Background

Eight Local Authorities are currently working with the Welsh Assembly Government on pilot projects formed as a response to the consultation process that took place two years ago on reforming the statutory process around pupils with special educational needs.

A major piece of work is exploring ‘The Role of the ALNCo’. Before this work can be progressed further, a fundamental requirement is to achieve clarity on what is meant by this term – additional learning needs co-ordinator – and it relationship to the role of SENCo – special educational needs co-ordinator.

The projects have also identified the broader issue concerning the use of terminology in this area of work.

This paper identifies the issues so that agreement can be reached to move things forward.

Context

The definition of a child with a special educational need (SEN) draws upon the 1996 Education Act and is outlined in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales (2002) as follows:
Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.

Children have a learning difficulty if they:

(a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or

(b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority

(c) are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision was not made for them.

Special educational provision means:

(a) for children of two or over, educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children of their age in schools maintained by the LEA, other than special schools, in the area

(b) for children under two, educational provision of any kind.

See Section 312, Education Act 1996

Para 1.3 SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002)

In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) issued a consultation document, Inclusion and Pupil Support (2006). This document laid out the context for further developments in this field by re-iterating the legal definition of a special educational need (SEN), whilst introducing a broader term, Additional Learning Needs (ALN). This is defined as:

‘This encompasses all children and young people with learning needs which are greater than those of the majority of their peers and not just those identified as having special educational needs as defined within the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002).

The term ‘Additional Learning Needs’ includes those learners who require additional support, either due to their circumstances or because they have a longer-term disorder or condition. In many cases, for example through sickness or where a family is experiencing temporary
difficulties, children and young people may have additional learning needs for a short period only.’

Para 1.5 / 1.6

The guidance goes on to define sixteen groups of learners including those with SEN, who may be vulnerable to underachievement in their education settings. This is a significant extension to the concept of groups identified as needing additional support, who are currently defined in statute.

In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) drafted Legislative Competency Orders (LCOs), with the intent of enabling the construction of any new statutory framework to support this developing agenda. The order states:

‘A person has ALN for the purposes of the order, if they receive education and training and:

(a) have a greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of the same age as those persons:

(b) have, or have had-

(i) a physical or mental impairment, or

(ii) a progressive health condition (such as cancer, multiple sclerosis or HIV infection) where it is at a stage involving no physical or mental impairment.

The order covers persons of any age in receipt of education and training who have for ‘whatever reason’, a greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of the same age as those persons, or a disability.’

(Append 1)

The Order identifies twelve specific groups of learners who may require additional learning support.
In a WAG briefing to Local Educational Authorities in January 2009 it was made clear;

‘The Welsh Assembly Government now has the legal powers to make legislative changes in the statutory framework for ALN. It intends to use these powers to ensure that, in Wales, there is effective protection of the entitlements and rights of children and young people with ALN and their families.’

(paragraph 3 Appendix A)

Conclusions

There are obvious disparities between definitions of Additional Learning Needs and also what constitutes an Additional Learning Need which impedes the progression of statutory change. Before legislative changes can, or should, be made, there needs to be much greater clarity concerning how we define ‘additional learning needs’ and how that relates to the support systems and mechanisms we need to see at all levels within the system - schools, Local Authorities and Welsh Assembly Government.

Issues/Questions

What is the definitive list of learners who have an ‘additional learning need’?

How is that agreed and communicated?

What processes/mechanisms are needed to ensure Estyn, SEF and other bodies, and initiatives, agree and share terminology?

Is there a clearly identified and ongoing role for the SENCo?

If the definition of SEN is to remain, how are we to define ‘severe and complex needs’ as identified in the ELLS Committee Policy Review of SEN Part 2?
Appendix 2

Additional Learning Needs – ALN
A National definition

Context

A number of pilot groups are developing work to support statutory reform in the area of additional learning needs. To help move this work forward, it has been proposed that the terminology in this area of work be clarified, and agreed.

Confusion has begun to arise when those groups of learners ‘vulnerable to underachievement’ are identified. What is increasingly clear is that it would be detrimental to any learners to presume that their identification within any sub group means they are, by definition, identified as underachieving.

Proposal

It is proposed that the definition of ALN in the Legislative Competency Orders (LCO) be confirmed:

‘A person has ALN for the purposes of the order, if they receive education and training and:

(c) have a greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of the same age as those persons:

(d) have, or have had-

(i) a physical or mental impairment, or

(ii) a progressive health condition (such as cancer, multiple sclerosis or HIV infection) where it is at a stage involving no physical or mental impairment.

The order covers persons of any age in receipt of education and training who have for ‘whatever reason’, a greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of the same age as those persons, or a disability.’

The significant part of the LCO definition is the reference to for ‘whatever reason’.

A Special Educational Need (SEN) has a definition in the Code of Practice.

To support and extend this definition, there are learner groups who may be identified as having more difficulty, or an increased vulnerability, because of
potential barriers they may face. Therefore, those learner sub groups nationally identified as potentially vulnerable to underachievement - disabled, medical needs, prolonged absence from school, difficult circumstances, Gypsy/Travellers, EAL / asylum seekers, LAC, young carers, pregnant and young parents, LGBT or pupils who perform – should only be a guide for educationalists on those groups of learners for whom processes need to be established. This is in order to ensure that their performance is monitored closely, and their achievement is fully supported.
Peer Review

Review of Paper Submitted by Heather Duncan January 2010

In her capacity as Lead Officer for XXX Local Authority on a Welsh Assembly Government (now Welsh Government) sponsored project researching the Role of the ALNCo (Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator), Heather identified an issue which would have a significant impact not only upon this LA’s workstream but for the entire Programme leading to statutory reform. There are a variety of different definitions of additional learning needs both in a legal and practitioner context. This potentially could lead to misunderstandings of those cohorts impacted by the reform and consequently affect the scope of research to be undertaken.

She prepared a paper, “Mind your Language”, which was designed to raise the issue with the other participating local authorities with the intention of obtaining agreement to highlight the discrepancies to the Statutory Reform Group. This group were acting in the capacity as a reference group for the Welsh Government.

From a personal perspective as Project Manager, the confusion between definitions was a serious inhibitor to progress. Clearly until a universal definition of additional learning needs was agreed, it was impossible to ascertain what cohort would be subject to the outcomes of the research.

Heather’s paper was presented at the project Lead Officers meeting, clearly defining the scope of the issue and inviting discussion proposed for the Statutory Reform Group. Below is an extract from minutes of Welsh Assembly Government meeting for project Lead Officers 27th January 2010:

Mind your Language

HD provided Mind your Language paper for discussion (copy attached).

Following a discussion around paper it was agreed that the pilot(s) needed to work with the definition of ALN in current legislation. The role of the pilots is to develop/pilot models for change e.g. ALNCo structure, roles and responsibilities etc and make recommendations.
The paper stimulated a great deal of debate and it was agreed that this would be presented to the Statutory Reform Group on the 21st April 2010. “Terminology” was a separate agenda item at this meeting and Heather produced an introductory paper (attached) which provided a high level explanation of the topic to be discussed. During the meeting she shared her Mind your Language paper which caused consternation, as the implications had not previously been recognised.

For the duration of the project various alternatives to the definition as stated in the Legislative Competency Order were put forward however it remained contentious, partly for political reasons and partly due to lack of agreement amongst practitioners. Heather’s paper was consistently referred to as the source discussion document during these deliberations.

Martin Seagrove A.C.I.B. PRINCE2 Practitioner

Project Manager
Notes on Self Evaluation Audit Tool

The Estyn Framework is used to determine areas that the school needs to prioritise rather than a grading system on performance. Those aspects identified as Excellent may only need to be sustained whereas those assessed as Adequate or Unsatisfactory may require prioritising in the school improvement processes.

Judgement Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>Strengths outweigh areas for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Estyn Common Inspection Framework – 1. Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Managers are confident in using assessment data to measure appropriate development for learners with ALN</td>
<td><em>(Evidence is implied, not listed)</em></td>
<td>• The ALNCo is familiar with and uses assessment data to identify progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• There is a range of clear evidence of attainment of individual pupils with ALN.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Pupils succeed in meeting specific and key targets in relation to their particular need.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The school analyses the progress of all pupils with ALN, ensuring that they make at least adequate progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. There are processes for all learners to evaluate and reflect upon their own performance.</td>
<td><em>(Evidence is implied, not listed)</em></td>
<td>• There is an Assessment policy that follows the principles of Assessment for Learning.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• There is a forum for structured consultation between adults and children about pupils progress.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The school meets the Essential Skills Quality Standard</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Learners are given opportunities to discuss their progress</td>
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### Estyn Common Inspection Framework – 2. Provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There are sufficient professionals, appropriate to the school, to support the needs of learners with ALN including SEN</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• There are a range of roles including teachers, HLTAs and TAs. • There is regular training for all staff on ALN issues.</td>
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<td>2. There are sufficiently suitably qualified or experienced staff for the range of ALN</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• There are named members of staff, properly trained, responsible for all aspects of ALN. • Staff are suitably qualified and experienced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The school makes good use of community and voluntary resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• School staff work closely with colleagues in other agencies. • The school directs parents/pupils to other agencies and support groups where appropriate. • The school draws upon a range of voluntary and community resources to extend learning opportunities.</td>
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<td>Provision</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> The ALNCo ensures there are appropriate curriculum opportunities for current and future ALN learner needs</td>
<td>• There is the appropriate curriculum offer.</td>
<td>• Where applicable there is collaboration with other agencies to provide appropriate learning opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The ALNCo strategically contributes to curriculum planning.</td>
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<td><strong>5.</strong> There is a range of graduated interventions to respond to learner needs</td>
<td>• Learners with the greatest need get the greatest level of provision</td>
<td>• A provision map for inclusion is in place and reviewed each year.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Specific intervention programmes are implemented, targeting the learning needs of groups of learners/individuals.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teachers are aware of learner needs in their lesson planning.</td>
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<td><strong>6.</strong> Provision for ALN learners is informed by monitoring and evaluation practices embedded with a focus on ensuring positive outcomes for standards and well-being</td>
<td>• The target setting process for all pupils must include relevant targets for pupils with ALN.</td>
<td>• Provision for learners with ALN is mapped.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Outcomes are regularly analysed and evaluated.</td>
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<td><strong>7.</strong> Provision planning is informed by robust review processes</td>
<td>• Leaders and managers regularly review and evaluate provision in relation to the impact it has on learner outcomes.</td>
<td>• Learner performance/outcomes inform planning.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Provision mapping is an annual process.</td>
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### Provision

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<th>8.</th>
<th>There is a sharing of effective practice which enables all learners to benefit from consistent, high quality, inclusive culture and practice</th>
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</table>
|        | - There is evidence of CPD at a whole school level  
|        | - The ALNCo is suitably qualified with additional qualifications.  
|        | - There is recognised training for those providing administrative support for the ALNCo.  
|        | - There are shared opportunities for teachers, bilingual and teaching assistants to develop a more collaborative approach.  
|        | - Joint planning takes place across the school to monitor and address ALN needs. |

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<th>9.</th>
<th>Appropriate identification of needs using assessment data and evidence of planned early intervention</th>
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|        | - Staff have knowledge of local and national guidance on identification and assessment of pupils with ALN and their role in its implementation.  
|        | - Whole school assessment procedures are used to inform the identification of pupils with ALN.  
|        | - Identification and intervention are both early and timely. |

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<th>10.</th>
<th>Training needs for all staff, teachers / TAs / Administration, are identified, planned for and linked to Performance Management</th>
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|        | - Teaching Assistants, bilingual assistants and other staff are regularly included in training opportunities.  
|        | - Professional development anticipates and responds to changes in the school population. |

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<th>11.</th>
<th>All teachers take responsibility for the needs and progress of all learners</th>
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|        | - Whole school monitoring of progress has a focus on those vulnerable to under-achievement.  
|        | - Lesson planning shows appropriate differentiation in relation to learner needs. |
## Estyn Common Inspection Framework – 3. Leadership

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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</table>
| 1. There is a clear and shared vision for ALN embodied in policy and practice | | • ALL school policies relate to ALL learners.  
• School policies are implemented by the whole-school/all stakeholders  
• There is clarity of communication processes across the whole school community, parents and stakeholders  
• The admissions policy is part of the inclusion policy and is clearly written, regularly reviewed and updated.  
• Parents, pupils and the local community are kept fully aware of the admissions and inclusion policies, and how that works in practice. |
| 2. There are clear roles relating to all aspects of ALN | | • Staff with specific ALN responsibilities have an up-to-date Job Description detailing the Job Purpose, Core Responsibilities and Suggested Performance Measures.  
• All teaching and support staff have Job Descriptions specifying role and responsibilities in respect of ALN.  
• There is a clear link to the Governing body with a named Governor for ALN |
|   | 3. There is a designated, appropriately qualified ALNCo holding a strategic post on the SMT | | | • The ALNCo on the SMT has specific qualifications or sufficient experience in the provision of education to children with ALN.  
• The ALNCo is recognised as a key member of the SMT.  
• The ALNCo must have proven ability to lead whole school initiatives. |
|   | 4. Sufficient non-contact time is safeguarded for the ALNCo to undertake essential co-ordination for the leadership and management of ALN | | | • Sufficient non-teaching time is safeguarded for the ALNCo to undertake administrative and whole-school support roles. |
|   | 5. The ALNCo strategically co-ordinates a range of specific interventions to meet the need of learners with ALN | | | • There is a graduated response to provision for ALN learners.  
• Interventions are regularly monitored and evaluated for their impact.  
• All staff know what interventions are used with their learners. |
6. The school demonstrates clear strategic direction for ALN through links between Self Evaluation and the School Improvement Plan which is led by the ALNCo

- There is a clear self evaluation process for ALN which links to the SIP and informs priorities.
- There are clear priorities for improving ALN provision.
- ALN priorities inform the SIP.
- There is evidence that the expertise of the ALNCo informs the priorities.
- Monitoring of ALN is part of the school improvement cycle.
- Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership with other teachers, teaching and bilingual assistants, and other professionals as appropriate.
- The school uses a range of appropriate additional assessment tools/procedures for identifying individual needs for pupils with ALN.
- There is a regular review of the impact of ALN provision.
- Department plans prioritise ALN needs.

7. Capacity to meet ALN needs of the school is strategically developed through the provision of high quality CPD linked to the School Improvement Plan

- All staff have undergone appropriate training in the fields of inclusion relevant to the needs of the school.
- Staff development plans are mapped against the inclusion development needs of the school so that training is co-ordinated and linked to the School Improvement Plan.
- There is specific ALN training for NQTs, EPDs and staff new to the school.

8. Priorities are identified to inform CPD needs for personnel through Performance Management processes of all staff

- Staff delivering programmes are highly trained and experienced.
- Aspects of inclusion are identified as priorities within the Performance Management process evidenced in the CPD programme.
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Governing Body understand their responsibilities in relation to ALN and has a nominated Governor</th>
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<td>9.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The designated ALNCo and link Governor liaise on a regular basis.</td>
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<td>There is an annual report to Governors on pupils with ALN.</td>
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<td>There is an evaluative report about ALN provision in the governor's annual report to parents.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There is evidence of Governors being trained in aspects of ALN.</td>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The school informs and involves parents in decision making about pupils</th>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>IEP shows evidence of parental involvement.</td>
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<td>IEP/ILP/PSPs are clearly written and actively reviewed, in partnership with outside agencies and parents.</td>
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<td>There are records of action taken following agency/parental concern.</td>
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<td>The school works with parents to provide joint intervention programmes, demonstrating well established communication systems.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The school facilitates a range of opportunities for parents to liaise with outside agencies.</td>
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<td>There is a policy for Home/School links.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There is a record of attendance at parents evenings.</td>
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</table>
| Leadership | 11. There are clear criteria and referral processes to communicate with and involve outside agencies | • There is evidence that schools are implementing intervention approaches in partnership with outside agencies.  
• There is evidence of the school seeking and receiving advice from outside agencies.  
• The school appropriately involves outside agencies.  
• All staff have a full understanding of the internal referral procedures and criteria and communicates effectively and appropriately with outside agencies.  
• There are tracking records of progress made of learners referred to outside agencies.  
• There is evidence of the impact and outcomes of referrals.  
• There is evidence that the school facilitates school-based external provision within the school setting. |
| 12. | The school plans, has active links with, and collaborates on its processes and practices with partner schools to ensure ALN are met | • There are strong links with feeder settings which include reciprocal visits and activities.
• Where appropriate, the school has links with Special Schools and other providers attended by local pupils and there are arrangements for those pupils to visit the school if appropriate.
• The school has developed collaborative links with other local schools and there is an interchange of staff and/or pupils for regular or specific projects.
• Well prepared transition documentation with explicit pupil information detailing anticipated requirements. Evidence of planned and executed school visits prior to transition. Outside agencies involved appropriately, according to the degree of the pupils needs.
• There is collaborative moderation of teacher assessment to achieve standardisation across transition. |

| 13. | The wider community contributes to the enrichment of the curriculum | • The school actively encourages the involvement of the wider community to the enrichment of the curriculum.
• The school implements community and local initiatives aimed at promoting cultural diversity and addressing racism.
• Schemes to provide positive role models and images that reflect the diversity in the community are supported by the school.
• There is evidence of fund raising activity. |
| 14. | The school works in partnership with the LEA in order to share good practice and further raise standards for all pupils | • The expertise and specialist knowledge of other professionals is actively sought and advice acted upon evidenced by Action Plans.  
• Centrally employed specialists (EPs / specialist teachers) confirm they work in partnership with the school.  
• Link Advisors or other LEA Officers are Critical Friends and there are notes of visits. |
| 15. | Financial resources are effectively deployed and their impact monitored with resources for teaching and learning appropriately distributed | • There are sufficient high quality resources to promote effective learning across the curriculum.  
• Each class has a range of appropriate resources/departments to support pupils in accessing the curriculum.  
• Resource allocation is linked to clear whole school ALN priorities. |
| 16. | The school physical environment is fit for purpose for all learners and is accessible and DDA compliant | • The school actively seeks to and succeeds in removing barriers to learning and participation for pupils with movement difficulties.  
• The school is committed to providing a high standard of support for pupils with ALN. All staff see it as their function.  
The effectiveness of support is regularly reviewed.  
• The school has an accessibility plan.  
• The school makes reasonable adjustments to the school environment. |
| Leadership | 17. Leaders and managers, including Governors effectively prioritise the use of resources for all aspects of ALN and regularly evaluate their impact | • The annual Governors Report To Parents includes details of how resources have been allocated for pupils with ALN.  
• Costed provision map demonstrates efficient and effective use of resources providing value for money.  
• The provision map is reviewed against outcomes for learners at least annually.  
• Staff regularly evaluate resources and their impact on learning.  
• Teaching activities are planned to make full use of all adults present in the classroom. |
Development of the specification for nationally approved training for special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) leading to the award of the National Award for SEN Coordination Wales

Introduction

To achieve the Output 9 in Pilot D “Develop the design and specification of an accredited course for ALNCo work with training Providers”, it was necessary to determine the current role of the SENCo. This was defined as a Project Product for several other Outputs and was specified to provide information enabling:

- Assessment of potential demand for a professional qualification and associated cost implications
- Assessment of current levels of TLRs and SEN Points to provide indicative data of the financial impact of mandatory membership of the SMT
- Assessment of the implication of recommending that the ALNCo must be a member of the SMT
- Assessment of the impact of recommending that it is mandatory that the ALNCo must be a qualified teacher

Since commencing Pilot D notification has been received that there may be a desire to implement the introduction of a qualification prior to statutory changes. The original Learning Outcomes were written for a qualification for ALNCo (Additional Learning Needs Coordinators) rather than SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) however the focus has been upon leadership and management rather than knowledge of specific interventions for learning needs. The emphasis on leadership and management is equally relevant for SENCOs and therefore early introduction of a qualification doesn’t require re-writing of the original specification.

To provide consistency and quality assurance the qualification should be mandatory for the SENCOs identified as the target cohort. This is proposed to be New to Role SENCOs i.e. within twelve months of appointment as SENCO. The Regulations should also allow for shorter periods as SENCO to be aggregated within the 12 month limit.

There should be a three year period of latitude to complete the training which provides flexibility to suit the individual circumstances of SENCOs and schools. For the majority of SENCOs, however, the course should take a year to complete on a part-time basis, assuming that no prior credit is awarded for previous experience or qualification.

Throughout this report the title SENCO is representative of all staff undertaking
duties in accordance with the SEN Code of Practice Wales 2002 irrespective of their title e.g. Inclusion Manager, AENCO, etc.

Methodology

A Reference Group of practitioners comprised of Local Authority officers and current SENCOs in Cardiff and Newport identified as exemplars, embraced the proposal for introduction of a qualification and drafted Learning Outcomes. Amongst many reasons for recommending the introduction for a qualification the most strongly supported were:

- To give the role the status that it required for maximum credibility within the school and with children, parents and carers, and external agencies
- To recognise the specialist expertise that is required for the role
- To improve the perception and understanding of the role with school management

It was identified that an Award for SEN Coordination was introduced in England in September 2009 and that synergies could be captured with the proposals for Wales. Meetings were held with consultants that worked on the proposals in England, and project officers attended a conference for training providers for the Award in England. Following the completion of the investigative study into the statutory background, composition, specification, learning outcomes and funding for the National Award for SEN Co-ordination in England synergies have been captured when defining the Learning Outcomes required for a Wales ALNCo qualification. By ensuring that there is a direct correlation between the Learning Outcomes for the Welsh and the English Awards we increase the portability of the qualification and add to its attractiveness to candidates.

The Learning Outcomes been revisited and discussed with the voluntary sector - SNAP (as part of Management Board) and NDCS who continue to be very supportive of our proposals.

A questionnaire was designed to capture data for several Outputs of Pilot D and also to provide information to inform decisions regarding the costs and impact of a qualification. It became evident that different questionnaires were required for Primary and Secondary phases. The more complex staffing structures, timetabling and teaching commitment at the Secondary phase needed a more qualitative approach than the quantitative Primary questionnaire although it also contained some quantitative questions.

The Primary phase questionnaire was circulated to Primary schools in Newport, Cardiff, Bridgend, and Carmarthenshire for SENCos, AENCos and Inclusion Managers to complete and return to the Project Manager for Pilot D. Returned questionnaires were interrogated and analysed by the Project Manager and reports subsequently produced. Please see Appendix A for details.

The Secondary phase questionnaire was devised using an iterative approach and having communicated the purpose and objectives to Cardiff and Newport SENCOs. Where questionnaires were not returned or inconsistent responses identified face-to-face interviews were arranged.
Specification for Training Providers and Learning Outcomes

A specification for the training delivery of the Award has been produced. Please see Appendix B. This is based upon the specification that was prepared by the TDA for the National Award for SEN Coordination in England. It was amended after consultation with the Reference Group of practitioners and to fit the context in Wales. It is constructed in three sections;

- Guidance on the criteria that training providers must meet
- The requirements for training providers
- The learning outcomes for those successfully completing nationally approved SENCOs

If the Specification is approved by the Management Board of the Pilot it will be put forward to the Welsh Assembly Government where consideration needs to be given regarding further consultation inline with the established Welsh Assembly Government process.

When the Specification has been through the full consultation process the Welsh Assembly Government can decide if they wish to proceed to tender through the procurement process at this stage or if it wishes to wait for statutory changes to introduce the role of the ALNCO.

Funding

There are three areas where cost considerations are applicable;

- Cost of the course
- Cost of cover for SENCOs to attend training
- Cost of remuneration/additional allowances for achieving the qualification and as acknowledgement of status within the school

Based upon discussions with the TDA and training providers in England the cost of the training is likely to be circa £2000 per person.

The potential cost of the course for Wales has been calculated on the following basis;

Using data from the questionnaire to Primary schools (193 schools) an average 14.58% of SENCOs would be classified as New to Role. If this is extrapolated across the 1487 Primary Schools in Wales, as at January 2010, this would suggest that approximately 220 Primary SENCOs would have to take the qualification.

Using data from the questionnaire to Secondary schools (28 schools) an average of 21.3% of SENCOs would be classified as New to Role. If this is extrapolated across the 223 Secondary Schools in Wales, as at January 2010, this would suggest that approximately 50 Secondary SENCOs would have to take the qualification.

Therefore this indicates that in total in the first years tranche circa 270 SENCOs would have to take the qualification.

If the recommendation that it is mandatory that all New to Role SENCOs undertake the course is followed the potential cost would be £540,000 (270 x £2,000).
Based upon 10 days cover required to release SENCOs for face-to-face training and study leave, at £150 per day, the total cost of cover per SENCO would be £1,500. Therefore total cost of cover for the first years tranche would be £405,000 (270 x £1,500).

The total cost therefore for the first tranche in respect of the delivery of training would be circa £945,000.

Discussions are being held regarding an automatic entitlement to an additional allowance upon completion of the qualification. The allowance has not yet been specified and it has not been determined if this will be awarded by way of SEN points, TLRs etc. Also it hasn’t yet been decided if any allowance will be made in addition to any pre-existing additional allowance or whether there will be a stipulation that after qualification the SENCO must have as a minimum say of a TLR point. For information purposes, at this stage research indicates that approximately 75% of Primary School SENCOs and 93% of Secondary School SENCOs are already either receiving TLRs or are on the Leadership pay spine.

**Recommendations**

The qualification is mandatory for New to Role SENCOs.

In relation to the Specification and learning outcomes the Pilot recommends that;

- The National Award for SEN Coordination Wales is introduced for SENCOs prior to legislative changes in respect of the ALNCO role
- No more than three training providers are accepted

The first recommendation is based upon the nature of the qualification where practitioners and other parties consulted to date judge that the focus on leadership and management makes it as relevant to SENCOs as it would be to the proposed role of the ALNCO.

The second recommendation is based upon the experiences in England, where in excess of 28 training providers were appointed and there were quality assurance issues.
References


Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/


Researcher development framework

http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/428241/Researcher-Development-Framework.html