REPORT

Academics Retiring, *Scunnered* Or Otherwise

Project: Managing career endings and the transition to retirement: The case of academics

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An extended working paper arising out of the Leverhulme Trust funded project 'Managing career endings and the transition to retirement: the case of academics'

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Project website: academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk

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Summary.

This extended working paper reports on an investigation into how the career endings of UK academics and their transition to retirement are managed by the individuals concerned and their employing institutions. The project was funded by the Leverhulme Trust. It was conducted over 18 months from October 2019, the majority of which time coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated revision of the original research design.

The principal data were collected through virtual interviews and two surveys, one of academics further on in their careers but still working (defined as receiving at least the majority of their income from paid work) and another of retired academics (defined as receiving the majority of their income from pensions). 81 survey participants were still working and 161 were retired. 54 interviews were conducted, 20 with participants who were still working and 34 retired. Overall the participants split into two halves, those under 70 and those aged 70 or over. Although the retired participants inevitably were concentrated in the older age groups, there was considerable variation in actual or planned age of retirement. Men made up between 55% and 69% of the different groups of participants, and there were further biases towards participants being white and working for (or having worked for) pre-1992 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Survey participants had better representation from STEM subjects, while the interviews had better representation from humanities and social sciences. Over 80% of survey participants lived in households with a partner (a minority of these with other family members as well). Interviewees included good representation from Scotland as well as England. Further data were collected relating to HEI policies on later careers and retirement, and relating to academic obituaries.

The survey data were collected between May and September 2020 and the interview data between May and October 2020. While the surveys and interviews were being set up, analysis of obituaries featuring in *The Times Higher* over the 5 years to December 2019 was conducted. The HEI policy documents were collected in January 2021.

The analysis of the data was framed around answering four questions: What does 'retirement' mean, and what does it look like? Is there a right time to retire? How do academic identities evolve? and, What support do universities provide? The discussion of the data in relation to these questions in section 3 makes up the bulk of this extended working paper, where the challenges of defining 'retirement' and 'careers' for academics are discussed. Four main themes emerged from the analysis, relating to the uncertainties surrounding later academic careers and retirement, the strong sense of academic work as a vocation, the complex nature of turning points and trajectories, and the importance of paying attention to contextual influences. The analysis of policy documents revealed wide variation in what is available by way of university support and also in its tone, and some indication of what might be considered good practice is given. Other material available to later career academics is also discussed, including consideration of the idea of 'role models'. It is concluded that although opportunities do exist for people to shape their path to academic retirement so that it fits their circumstances and preferences, nevertheless difficulties remain. Participation in three ongoing conversations is recommended.

Section 1. Introduction

The formative influences on a research project can be many and varied. One of the serendipitous points of departure for this project has been mentioned already in the acknowledgements, the honours student whose dissertation investigated why a group of hospital employees continued in work beyond the state retirement age. At about the same time I was reading this I came across Les Back's bold declaration that 'For academics retirement is fast becoming a thing of the past' (2016: 185). Passing the milestone of my sixtieth birthday and, shortly before that, being sent by my General Practitioner straight to Accident and Emergency for tests on an unspecified condition (which happily turned out to be reassuringly ordinary) were more personal prompts to reflect on the working time that I had remaining. These thoughts meshed with research interests that had engaged me previously, around the topics of endings (Crow 2005a), of winners and losers (Crow and Rees 1999), and of strategy (Crow 1989), in this case as they related to careers. The idea that political careers typically end in failure and disappointment despite elaborate strategising to avoid such an outcome is not new (Powell, 1977); nor is the suggestion that this may apply to other fields of endeavour, including the groves of academe (Crow 2020f). Gary Marx describes this candidly as the movement 'from "Who's Who" to "Who's he?"' (2017: 125). However, academic careers are distinctive in several respects, and an article in the *Times Higher Education* concerning the potential of formal retirement to *enhance* a person's opportunities for academic achievement must have piqued my interest sufficiently for me to put it into a folder of cuttings for further consideration at some point in the future. That article is dated 2008, and highlighted the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's sincere advice 'to retire from active university service as soon as possible'. He had used the time since his own retirement nearly two decades previously to maximise space for writing and public engagement, making the most of the wisdom that comes with longevity because, as he saw it, 'the volume of knowledge possessed by scholars working in the humanities tends to grow with their owners'/carriers' age' (in Reisz 2008: 38, 40). Subsequently the *Times Higher Education* has provided a forum for expression of contrary opinions to Bauman's, celebrating the legal changes that have freed academics from the requirement to retire at specified ages, or railing against the perceived injustice of Employer Justified Retirement Ages (EJRAs) at a small number of UK Universities. In turn, the change in the law regarding fixed retirement ages has prompted concerns about the impact that older academics staying in post is having on career opportunities for younger generations (Baker 2021). Such a live issue raises many points of contention.

Studying UK academics' later careers and retirement has lived up to the expectation that it would provide a fascinating research topic, one surprisingly neglected in the literature on career planning (as Hay [2017: 200] notes) and on academic rhythms (Frost and Taylor 1996). It generated methodological challenges long before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic forced urgent re-thinking of the research design. The project benefitted from the survey questions used in Tizard and Owen's (2001) study being made available, although the shortness of the intervening period was still sufficient to necessitate some adjustments in order to keep up with unfolding social and organizational change. The virtual interviews which replaced the planned focus groups threw up many interesting findings, with especially

surprising ones relating to the use of visual methods and of the concept of academic role models. The project has also presented definitional challenges, in particular about the meaning of 'retirement', which have relevance well beyond careers in academia. It quickly became apparent just how much can be learned from the detailed and systematic study of obituaries (Fowler 2007, 2015), and this interest was deepened, albeit with regret, as former colleagues were included among the names of people whose deaths were announced as the project proceeded. The accompanying sense of loss was felt particularly keenly on hearing that Chris Skinner had died still in post at the age of 66 (Chambers *et al*. 2020), less than a decade on from working with him at my previous university. The news of the death of David Morgan, retired but still very actively engaged in academic activity, at the age of 82 (Scott 2020) a few months later provided another sad reminder of debts owed to people whom I regard as academic role models for their perspicacity and generosity, qualities which shone through in their obituaries as they had in life. Obituaries tell us many things, and those published in the *Times Higher Education* between January 2015 and December 2019 (256 in total) convey the heterogeneous character of academic careers (Crow 2020b, 2020c, 2020d), including diversity of duration. The average age of death in these obituaries was calculated to be 75, and although by their nature they are not a representative sample of all academics, the figure nevertheless reminds us of our own mortality. As it happens, it is approximately the average of my two role models mentioned in this paragraph, and 75 was the age at which another, Ray Pahl, died a decade ago (Crow and Ellis 2017: 21). The death of another sociologist whose work I much admired, Veronica Beechey, was announced as the finishing touches were being added to this extended working paper, and she, too, was 75 (Taylor 2021). But academic lives do not have a predetermined length. Bauman, mentioned in the previous paragraph, lived to be 91 (Wagner 2020: 396); another prominent sociologist who will be encountered below, Charles Wright Mills, lived less than half as long, dying aged only 45 (Crow 2005b: 86).

The capacity of obituaries and other forms of telling biographical stories to place greater emphasis on their subjects' achievements and positive characteristics than they do on their shortcomings and on chance represents a potential limitation, although there may be signs that this is shifting. Ann Oakley's (2011) account of the life of the pioneering social scientist Barbara Wootton is tellingly entitled *A Critical Woman*, while Julia Brannen's autobiographical account has been written mindful of 'the dangers of presenting my research career as a coherent narrative' and the consequent decision to include 'the twists and turns of fortune' (2019: 3), similar to what Jeffrey Weeks in his memoir calls 'critical moments' (2021: xviii), to take just three examples from a much larger literature. Nevertheless, a long-standing bias towards sanitization (if not sanctification) can be detected in this broad body of work, which may help to explain the appeal of alternatively analysing academic careers as if they were the embodiment of more earthy animals. Most famous in this regard is Isaiah Berlin's (1953) comparison of determined but inflexible and disputatious hedgehogs and cunning but easily-distracted foxes who are content with *ad hoc* solutions; many other animals besides these two have the potential to be illuminating, such as eagles, bears, beavers and jackdaws (Crow 2020f). Responses following a presentation based on this article included the unkind (but nevertheless quite possibly

justified) suggestion that peacocks and snakes ought also to feature! The characterisation of contemporary universities provided another controversial topic about which strongly-help opinions were voiced during the course of this project, reflecting the literature in which a sense of crisis pervades discussion of the fundamental question of universities' purpose (Bailey and Freedman 2011; Holmwood 2011).

Decisions about whether and when to retire may relate to various aspects of academics' personal 'milieux', but they also relate to 'public issues of social structure' around which a sense of 'malaise' may develop, to use the language of Mills' (2000: 8, 11) classic formulation. Mills was writing in the 1950s, but many of his ideas have stood the test of time. In a lesser-known passage of *The Sociological Imagination* he detected changes underway in the nature of academic careers that were being forged by those with a more entrepreneurial spirit than 'the old-fashioned professor'. The situation of this 'new entrepreneur' contrasted with that of their 'more cloistered colleagues' by virtue of preparedness to seek out innovative avenues of influence and advancement, but Mills was wary of endorsing such a change because people in a hurry can find, to their chagrin, that they have jumped from a frying pan into a fire. As Mills expressed it, 'these new careers, while lifting the professors out of the academic rut, may have dropped them into something at least as unsatisfactory' (2000: 98). Mills's concerns about the changing criteria by which academic success is judged have not gone away; indeed, it could be argued that they have become more pressing with the passage of time. Certainly, the idea that audit culture and the related focus on league tables of performance have come to dominate universities is a theme that features prominently in this extended working paper. Researchers have long been interested in the role and changing nature of universities (Halsey 1995). These include researchers funded from 1932 onwards by the Leverhulme Trust, with its brief to foster new ideas and explore their implications, described by Asa Briggs as a combination of 'commitment to the adventure of learning and research with a concern for practical results' (1991: 12). Similar concerns underpinned the research undertaken by Tizard and Owen (2001) into retired university staff (which was funded by the Nuffield Foundation) by and Tizard (2004) into university policies as they related to former academic employees. These studies provide a benchmark against which change in the intervening period can be gauged, for example in relation to the gendered character of post-retirement trajectories that Tizard and Owen detected. How universities have responded to criticisms of being insufficiently supportive of retiring academics is another part of the agenda bequeathed by earlier research, along with determining just how much of a change to academics' lives retirement actually brings.

The ambition of the project design to be inclusive of and relevant to participants from all UK higher educational institutions (HEIs) and disciplines sits alongside the unabashedly sociological foundations of the research approach adopted. The sociologist Helen Ebaugh's study of the process of exiting from a role, *Becoming an EX*, included retirees amongst her interviewees along with people who had become an 'ex' by a variety of other routes such as divorced people, ex-convicts, recovered alcoholics, and ex-nuns (into which latter category she herself fell). The status of being an 'ex' is one into which individuals have to be socialised, but her study discovered evidence of significant variation in how prepared people

are for their new role: 'In some instances, exiters do engage in anticipatory socialization. However, there are some exiters who have little or no idea of what they will do after a major role exit'. Both groups have to find ways of dealing with 'disengagement' (1988: 181) and with the anxieties, sense of being torn, and doubts about identity that accompany it. Ebaugh's analysis also highlights the importance of 'turning points', a concept featuring as well in the more mathematically-informed work of another American sociologist, Andrew Abbott. Abbott's discussion uses the example of careers to contrast the smooth predictability of regular trajectories with the interruptions or radical shifts that are turning points. Careers may have predictable phases characterised by 'a strongly coercive trajectory' in which little room for manoeuvre exists and other phases featuring 'a quite chaotic turning point' (2001: 247). His elaboration of this distinction is worth quoting because it links it to the broader issue of the relative weight attached to structural determination alongside individual action. Abbott describes turning points as

> 'points at which the interlocked networks of relation that preserve stability come unglued and the (normal) perpetual change of social life takes over…. A major turning point has potential to open a system the way a key has the potential to open a lock. In both cases, too, action is necessary to complete the turning' (2001: 258).

Despite working with different types of data, Ebaugh (1988: ch.4) and Abbott (2001: ch.8) both attach importance to turning points as moments requiring decisions to be made, moments during which 'an individual must leap' from one trajectory to another. That said, Abbott's further observation that we should 'expect the beginnings of turning points to be fuzzy' (2001: 247, 252) means that people's understanding of the processes in which they are involved will be imperfect. This links to Ebaugh's point about the presence of anxieties and doubts as changes unfold. Put another way, the approaching end of a trajectory 'is not necessarily perceived as such by those living through it' (Crow 2005a: 2.3).

A related proposition developed in the sociology of endings is that 'Accounts of change after the event are vulnerable to *post-hoc* rationalizations' (Crow 2005a: 2.8). Narratives of careers are a prime example of this, and the misleading nature of professional careers being characterised as resembling the steady progression of an individual up a ladder has long been recognised (Johnson 1983; Platt 1976). Other characterisations of academic careers are available, such as Peter Worsley's choice of the phrase 'skating on thin ice' in the title of his autobiographical account. His book includes the candid observations that 'everyone's life has passages that they'd rather forget' and, more specifically, 'Everyone has a research disaster somewhere that doesn't get highlighted in their CV' (2008: ix, 159). Worsley's preparedness to include such episodes is especially to his credit given his awareness that autobiographies and memoirs are selective accounts that are written looking backwards, or *After The Fact* as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1995) puts it. Geertz notes the unavoidably difficult nature of selecting what to include: if careers are among those phenomena that are 'lived forward, understood backward', the result is that 'there seems to be no place to stand so as to locate just what has altered and how' (Geertz 1995: 167, 2). The geographer Doreen Massey's suspicion 'of what she called "origin stories"' (Lee 2017: 162) is relevant here because there is a temptation to frame understandings of what

happens over the course of a life in terms of formative influences during childhood and youth. It is well-known, of course, that later life as it is anticipated may be wide of the mark in important respects, for example when old age begins (Hoggart 1999: 221), although imagined futures essays written by young people are not always linear in their predictions. Sometimes they resemble more closely the unpredictability of a game of snakes and ladders (Crow and Andrews 2019: 563-4, 561). John Hall is not alone among academic authors of autobiographical accounts to play down the extent to which careers are controllable: 'Not everything – indeed perhaps not much – in life is planned' (2005: 137). His narrative, like many other sociologists' reflections (Berger 1990, Darling and Stein 2017, Deflem 2007, Sica and Turner 2005, Twamley *et al*. 2015), highlights accidental and serendipitous influences, as befits accounts that are better described as journeys than climbing ladders.

The age of 50 is taken by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot to be the starting point of what she calls *The Third Chapter* of adult life, which she describes as a phase of 'creative and purposeful learning' for people who are 'neither young nor old' and who are experiencing 'loss and liberation' (2009: 6, 10, 19). As she elaborates elsewhere (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2012), engaging with Albert Hirschman's (1970) classic argument, exit may offer a better option than either prioritising loyalty or giving voice to one's grounds for dissatisfaction. This fits Worsley's account of this period of his life which took on a new direction at age 60 in 1984 with the 'totally unexpected' (2008: 225) opportunity to take early retirement. His obituarist's description of what followed is a story of creativity in both old and new fields:

> 'His "third age" was rich with activity. He and Sheila [his wife] bought a narrow boat, in which they travelled the canals of England. His cultural tastes ranged widely – film, music, Manchester United – and he loved the conviviality of parties and festivals. He was active in his local Labour party, and did voluntary work teaching elderly people computer skills. He revived his old interest in medical anthropology and indigenous knowledge systems, leading to an undeservedly neglected book, *Knowledges: Culture, Counterculture, Subculture* (1997). His memoir, *An Academic Skating on Thin Ice* (2008), dedicated to his grandchildren, conveys his intellectual vitality and generosity of spirit' (Peel 2013).

Worsley's account of his 'fourth age' (written in his eighties) has a more sober tone, both for its reflection on continuing academic activity – 'there comes a time when one has used up the empirical data in one's notebooks; a time, too, when one has nothing new that one desperately wants to say in theoretical terms' – and for its acknowledgement of the constraints imposed by physical illness. Even this, though, is upbeat about the prospects for achieving a modicum of control over the course taken by a life. Exercising such control may include making adjustments to the goals being pursued, as Ray Pahl suggested in a book published when he himself was 60: 'the process of getting older and wiser could well lead many people to a re-evaluation of what had appeared at an earlier age to be success'. Pahl did, however, consider that such reorientations were typically accompanied by 'uncertainty and anxiety', especially at a historical moment characterised by what he called 'increasing flexibilization of employment' (1995: 37-8, x). Academics feature among both Pahl's and Lawrence-Lightfoot's participants, and although they are portrayed as having high levels of

control over their lives in comparison to people in many other occupations, nevertheless it is clear that even they face limits to their capacity to determine events.

The administrative and policy context represents one of the constraining influences on later academic careers and retirement. In an American setting the observation that 'only a minority of African American faculty get to retire on their own terms' encouraged Elizabeth Higginbotham to try to do just that by carving out 'more time for reflection and writing, including writing for a broader audience' and continuing to be 'involved in the struggle for social justice'. Her mindfulness that 'not every Black woman in the Academy has this privilege' (2017: 187, 196) reflects the simple but important point that a person's experience of the retirement process will be shaped by 'the interplay between welfare, in its various guises, social divisions and exclusion' (Mann 2001: 2). Kirk Mann's analysis highlights how the approach of retirement will be experienced in contrasting ways according to people's social class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and other dimensions of inequality. A focus on gender, for example, may draw attention to older women's expression of concerns about 'casualization, precarity, under-employment…. lower superannuation and poverty, and impediments to living a fulfilling life' (Taylor *et al*. 2021: 6). Chris Phillipson and his colleagues in their study of the 'radical changes affecting the late working life environment' (2019: 338) have noted that it is possible to detect significant variation in the extent to which workers are knowledgeable about their rights at work and about the consequences of retirement, that ageism is a particularly potent problem when combined with sexism, and that employer organizations commonly fall short in terms of encouraging older workers to take up the flexible working arrangements that are available. All of these stand as potential limitations on the control that people can exercise over the paths that their lives follow, with decisions made in the context of uncertainty about how the future will unfold. This theme of uncertainty is also developed by John Goodwin and Henrietta O'Connor who argue that

> 'despite the emergence of retirement courses offered by some employers, the lack of direct experience of retired people means that nothing, or very little, that the older workers have learned through their years at work can actually prepare them for the experience of finishing work themselves. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, for those approaching retirement to prepare and plan for this life-stage as their knowledge of the reality of the lived experience of retirement is lacking' (2014: 579).

In the absence of direct experience, some older workers in their study were fearful of life without work, while others held 'idealised notions' that bordered on 'fantasy' (2014: 582). This subjective dimension might help to explain why, contrary to expectations that financial considerations would be the prime determinant of staying on at work, David Lain's analysis of English and US data from the early 2010s found that 'employment at 65+ was actually most common among the highly educated and healthy'. These findings are consistent with the conclusion that 'abolishing mandatory retirement is likely to have less impact on the poorest segments than the richest' (2018: 131, 156), and that staying on at work by choice

(as opposed to doing so through economic necessity) is a prominent feature of contemporary labour markets.

The analysis of the data collected during this project is presented in section 3, the findings part of this extended working paper, under four broad headings as answers to the questions 'What does "retirement" mean, and what does it look like?', 'Is there a right time to retire?', 'How do academic identities evolve?', and 'What support do universities provide?'. Participants in the study, both survey respondents and interviewees, have been remarkably generous with their time and energies to answer questions related to these themes fully and with candour. They have done so on the understanding that they will not be identifiable, and to that end characteristics that have the potential to compromise their anonymity have been withheld. People are referred to only as numbers (e.g. 'interviewee 12' or SWIFE#31 and RIFE#59, the latter two for imagined futures essay-writers who are still working or retired respectively), and their employing institutions and disciplines have also not been shared; more of an indication of participants' ages is given, in the round for the profile of participants as a whole and also for individuals where appropriate. Although some of the participants do have quite distinctive individual profiles, these have not been shared because of confidentiality considerations and also because the main thrust of the analysis concerns presenting the general picture. For some aspects of this endeavour percentages of respondents' situations or opinions are given, rounded to the nearest whole number and allowing for the missing data that characterises surveys in which answering each question is optional. For other issues more qualitative data are used to convey points most effectively. Mindful of the danger of 'cherry picking' of data from a minority of interviewees who have a particularly fluent way with words, care has been taken to ensure that all interviewees (together with a reasonable number of survey respondents) are given a voice in what follows. In fact, this ambition was easy enough to achieve, partly because this is a highly-educated and articulate sample, and partly because the outlines of patterns in participants' career trajectories emerged fairly clearly as the project proceeded. UK HEIs whose policy documents are analysed in section 3.d) have not been identified (except for one in the conclusion to section 4 which is presented as a model of good practice), even though the documents accessed were freely available on their websites. This is because of concerns that the identification of institutions might lead them to reconsider their decision to make their documents available, to the detriment of future researchers, broader transparency, and public debate.

Section 2. The project.

The project ran from 1 October 2019 for 18 months, funded by the Leverhulme Trust (award number RF-2019-623\8). It was conceived as a mixed methods research design, and although the original plans had to be revised in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was retained. It made sense to build on the survey-based research of Tizard and Owen (2001) and this promised to allow some sense of change over time, while the case for undertaking complementary qualitative work (Amabile 2019) was a compelling one. The move from focus groups to interviews involved a change in the mode of qualitative data collection, but it remained possible to use of photographs as visual prompts. Documentary methods were also used, both in the collection and analysis of policy documents relating to later careers and retirement of UK HEIs and the analysis of academics' obituaries, which was an additional activity to those originally planned, made possible by the COVID-related delay of other data collection.

2.a) Data collection

The data collection comprised several elements.

2.a) i). The survey component, using Online Surveys, had two elements, a survey of staff previously employed by UK HEIs who were already wholly or mainly retired (defined as receiving all or the majority of their income from occupational and state pensions) and a survey of staff of UK HEIs who were still working and receiving the majority of their income from that work. The surveys were piloted in early 2020 on 10 participants known by the researcher to have interests in the fields of academic careers and retirement, 7 still working and 3 retired, and at a mix of pre- and post-1992 universities in England and Scotland. Several adjustments were made in the light of these participants' answers and comments in the pilot phase, including more precise specification of the definition of 'retirement' given that it is now possible to take up to 80% of one's pension while continuing to work on a fractional contract, which complicates the definitional challenge. In the main phase the surveys for respondents defined as 'retired' or 'still working' contained 62 and 29 questions respectively, with many of these questions derived from or based on those in Tizard and Owen's (2001) study of recently-retired UK university staff, to facilitate some sense of change over time.

It had originally been hoped to draw a pre-selected sample from the membership of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (as Tizard and Owen had done). However, USS was unable to facilitate this as to do so might have cut across the organisation's responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). It was, therefore, necessary to shift from a probability to a non-probability sample design and to encourage participation by publicising the survey through a variety of relevant channels. Bodies approached with the request to draw the attention of members to the surveys included the Society for Research into Higher Education, the Staff and Educational Development Association, the British Educational Research Association, the British Psychological Society, the British Sociological Association, the Academy of Social Sciences, the Academy of Medical Sciences, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Royal Society, the Royal Society of

Edinburgh, the University and Colleges Union, and retired staff associations at 12 Universities whose organisers' contact details were readily available on the web. Some of these bodies responded positively to the request to advertise the surveys by drawing the attention of their members (including member organizations as well as individual members) to the project website containing further information about and links to the surveys; others may have done so without informing me, and none explicitly declined the request. In addition, the project was advertised by University of Edinburgh colleagues through social media, and via articles in three publications, *Discover Society,* the *Times Higher Education* and *Everyday Society*.

The surveys were completed anonymously, and were open from May through to the end of September 2020. There were 161 and 81 respondents to the surveys of retired and current staff respectively. Further information about the characteristics of the achieved samples – and discussion of the implications for generalisation – can be found below. At the end of the surveys, respondents were invited to write an essay imagining their futures; 66 (41%) of the retired respondents and 29 (36%) of the currently employed respondents completed this task (some briefly, a few extensively). Five of the 10 pilot survey respondents also wrote essays imagining their futures.

2.a) ii). Qualitative interviews were carried out with 54 current and former UK academic staff. 6 of these were conducted by email and 48 by a virtual connection using Zoom or Skype. A further 13 people (19% of those invited) were contacted but not interviewed (2 declined the invitation, 7 did not reply, 3 agreed to be interviewed but it proved impossible to find a convenient time, and one did not return the email interview he was sent). These interviews were an agreed substitute for the 6 focus groups that had been part of the original research design but which had to be re-thought in the context of COVID-19 and restrictions on travel and face-to-face contact. Leverhulme approved this requested change promptly in March 2020 and virtual interviews commenced in May once institutional ethics approval for the change had been received. Interviews were conducted by Graham Crow over a five-month period to October 2020. Potential interviewees were contacted using snowball sampling, expanding outwards from the initial contacts made by the researcher, and with requests for suggestions of further participants steered with a view to securing a diverse sample along lines of academic discipline and type and location of university as well as personal characteristics and situations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and interviewees were provided with the transcripts and given the opportunity to edit them if they wished to. Participants were assured that no identifying information would be included in any of the project outputs. Each interview was based on 15 main questions and lasted an hour, on average. A part of each interview was devoted to discussion of thirty four images of retirement located on the project website https://www.academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk/images/ (an activity that had previously been planned to be part of the focus groups).

2.a) iii). Documents relating to UK universities' policies on managing their staff's transition to retirement. The decision was taken to delay collection of these documents until January 2021 in light of the pressures imposed on UK universities by COVID-19 in 2020 in the hope

that the situation might have eased by then, but this turned out not to be the case. As a result, this element of the project was limited to collection of data from HEI websites and only a small number of follow up queries where website documents indicated that inquiries might be easily responded to, in recognition of the pressures that HEI staff were facing at that time. Not all of the 88 HEI websites visited made relevant documents publicly available, and those that did were varied in both their content and tone. They nevertheless provided some useful points of connection with Tizard's (2004) study.

2.a) iv). Delays to the commencement of the surveys and interviews created the opportunity to undertake an additional activity, analysis of the obituaries featured in the *Times Higher Education* over the 5 years from January 2015. During this period a total of 262 obituaries were featured; these were predominantly of men (only a quarter were of women) and of people who had achieved senior positions in UK HEIs (although a substantial minority lived and worked outside of the UK, principally in the USA). Three short research notes were written on the basis of these obituaries (research notes 2-4 at https://www.academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk/researchnotes/).

2.b) Research samples

At the outset, it must be emphasised that caution has to be exercised regarding claims made about the samples' representativeness of later career and retired UK academics. As is discussed in more detail below, men outnumber women (as they have done historically in higher education, although the percentage of men is lower than the 88% of academics in Tizard and Owen's (2001: 255) survey); there is a bias towards inclusion of professors; people associated with pre-1992 higher education institutions predominate, particularly in the surveys; in the surveys (and quite possibly also among the interviewees as well) participants identifying as being from a minority ethnic background are underrepresented; and among the interviewees, arts, humanities and social science disciplines are over-represented, while by contrast the majority of survey respondents are from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Given that academic staff working in UK Universities who are not UK nationals now comprise nearly one third of the total (HESA 2021) this is likely to be an underrepresented group in the interview sample, at least (and possibly as well among the survey participants, from whom data relevant to this question were not collected). Nevertheless, the profile of the study participants does convey something of the diversity of later career and retired academics in terms of age of retirement, gender, institution type, discipline, and household situation, all of which are plausible influences on the course taken by an individual's career trajectory. The study's participants were by no means of one voice regarding the key issues of debate about which they were invited to put on record their experiences and express their opinions.

2.b) i) Age: Based on the definition of 'retired' as receiving all or most of one's income from pensions, the number of retired survey respondents (161) was almost double that of those who completed the survey for those still working (81), that is, people whose main source of income was employment. As would be expected, the latter were typically younger than the former, with the majority (69 [85%]) of those working in their sixties, while the majority (110 [69%]) of retired survey respondents were aged 70 or above. However, the age profiles

of these two samples overlapped quite extensively, with 18 (11%) of the retired respondents being aged under 66 (the current state retirement age), and 36 (45%) of respondents who were still receiving the majority of their income from paid work being aged 66 or over. Over three quarters of working survey respondents (62 [77%]) had thirty or more years of employment in universities under their belts, including 24 (30%) for whom this figure was at least 40 years. Of the 36 working beyond their 66th birthday, 21 (58%) were working full-time, while of the 45 respondents aged under 66, 6 (13%) were working part-time. Among the retired respondents, 35 (22%) had worked until they were 67 or older, while 21 (13%) had retired before the age of 60; approximately two thirds, 105 (65%), had retired between the ages of 60 and 66. These figures showed less influence than might have been expected of the different ages of entitlement to state pensions of 60 for women and 65 for men that applied until 2010 when the process of moving towards equalisation commenced, with the proportions for men and women in the three age groupings being surprisingly close: 10% of men and 18% of women had retired before age 60, 67% of men and 61% of women had retired between 60 and 66, and 23% of men and 20% of women retired at 67 or older.

A similar pattern applied to the 54 interviewees, among whom 6 (18%) of the 34 retired participants were aged under 66, and 6 (30%) of the 20 participants who were still working were aged 66 or older. 'Early' retirement (that is, at an age lower than when a person becomes eligible for their state pension) has long been a recognised phenomenon, and was at one time regarded as on the way to becoming a norm in several countries including the UK (Kohli *et al*. 1991). More recently, changes to UK regulations around fixed retirement ages in 2011 have allowed people greater opportunities to continue in work beyond the age at which they become eligible for their state pension, and although they are as yet still low, the numbers of UK academics working into their later sixties and beyond are rising (Baker 2021). Among interviewees, 4 of the 6 in this category were aged 70 or over, including 2 still working full-time, and among participants in the survey of academics who were classified as still working because they received the majority of their income from work rather than from pensions, 6 (7%) were 70 or older. Fifty nine (74%) of the survey participants classified as still working were employed full-time, and although the preferred pattern that was anticipated was to retire from a position of working part-time, by no means everyone planned to do so.

Table 1. Age profile of research participants

	Aged under 60	Aged 60-65	Aged 66-69	Aged 70+
Working survey participants (81)	6 (2 p-t*)	39 (4 p-t)	30 (13 p-t)	6 (2 p-t)
Retired survey participants (160)**	2	16	32	110
Working interviewees (20)	8	6	2	4
Retired interviewees (34)	0	6	2	26
Total survey participants + interviewees (295)	16 (5%)	67 (23%)	66 (22%)	146 (49%)

*p-t=part-time. **The participant who did not give their age is omitted from this table

2.b) ii) Gender and ethnicity: Men comprised the majority of both survey respondents and interviewees. Among retired survey respondents 109 (69%) were men, 49 (31%) were women and 1 (1%) identified as other (and a further respondent did not give their gender), while among survey respondents still working 48 (59%) were men and 33 (41%) were women. These figures are consistent with reduction over time in gender imbalance in the academic workforce, as are the distributions among the interviewees: for retired interviewees, 23 (68%) were men and 11 (32%) women, while among those still working 11 (55%) were men and 9 (45%) were women.

The survey samples were overwhelmingly white, with only 4 (3%) of retired respondents who answered the question and 1 (1%) of the participants still working self-identifying as BAME. Interviewees were not asked to identify their ethnicity.

2.b) iii) Institutional and disciplinary affiliations: Affiliations with pre-1992 Universities predominated, with 214 (88%) of survey respondents and 37 (69%) of interviewees having these as their present or final employer while 16 (7%) of survey participants and 17 (31%) of interviewees were from post-1992 Universities. A further 12 (5%) of survey respondents indicated other employers. Survey respondents were not asked which UK home nation they worked in but among interviewees 24 (44%) worked in or had retired from Scottish Universities; for the 37 interviewees associated with pre-1992 Universities this figure was 13 (35%) and for the 17 associated with post-1992 Universities it was 11 (65%). All other employing Higher Education Institutions for interviewees were in England. Interviewees were spread across a total of 29 HEIs, 19 pre-1992 Universities and 10 post-1992. In terms of positions in Universities, among the retired survey respondents 112 (70%) had reached the position of professor while among the survey respondents still working the figure was 73 (90%). Of the interviewees, a comparable proportion (44, or 81%) were professors or emeritus professors. Survey participants were not asked whether their academic careers had been exclusively as researchers or had included teaching and administration alongside research, but interviewees' accounts of their careers identified the latter trajectory in almost all cases. Career researchers may therefore have been neglected in the study.

In terms of disciplinary affiliation, there were more survey respondents in the Research Excellence Framework disciplinary groupings A and B (Medicine, health and life sciences; Physical sciences, engineering and mathematics) than there were for REF disciplinary groupings C and D (Social sciences; Arts and humanities), though the disciplinary distribution among interviewees was markedly different. Of survey respondents, 141 (58%) were in groupings A or B, spread across 10 of the 12 disciplines listed there, and 101 (42%) in groupings C or D, spread across 17 of the 22 disciplines listed there. By contrast, recruitment of interviewees was skewed towards people affiliated to disciplines in groupings C or D; 47 (87%) of the interviewees were spread across 13 of these 22 disciplines, while only 7 (13%) of the interviewees were in groupings A or B, spread across 6 disciplines. Such imbalance is recognised as a potential disadvantage of snowball sampling, which was used in the recruitment of interviewees, because of its dependence on social network connections.

2.b) iv) Household type. Another potentially relevant factor for retirement trajectories is household type. The majority of survey participants, both those still working (49 [60%]) and

those retired (117 [74%]), lived with their partner, while a further 19 (23%) and 14 (9%) respectively lived with a partner and one or more others. Thus 83% of both sets of survey respondents lived with their partners and in some cases further household members such as children. The next largest group for both sets of participants lived alone (8 [10%] and 19 [12%] respectively), then came those living alone with a partner elsewhere (5 [6%] and 5 [3%] respectively), and finally a small group of retired participants (3 [2%]) who lived with others. (The 3 retired participants who preferred not to answer this question have been excluded from the calculation of percentages.) Holmes's (2014) qualitative investigation of academics who lived apart from their partners for much of the time found that this phenomenon was not restricted to couples who were earlier in their careers and managing a temporary necessity; one in five of her participants were aged over 50, although her follow-up study confirmed that those couples who had children were presented with additional challenges to the maintenance of a distance relationship. Put another way, it is important to acknowledge how family and household structures may influence the course that careers take and people's perceptions of retirement.

Section 3. Findings

3.a) What does 'retirement' mean, and what does it look like?

An important part of the purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of 'retirement' for academics. It was noted above in the description of the survey design for this project that defining 'retirement' proved problematic. Eventually it was decided to direct survey participants to one of the two surveys (for those still working and those retired) according to whether they received at least the majority (if not all) of their income from paid work or from pensions. Even this left anomalous situations, relating for example to people who had left academic posts in mid-career, illustrated by Malcolm Gaskill's (2020) candid account of voluntary severance from an academic post aged 53, published in the *London Review of Books* during the course of the project, to which more than one interviewee referred. Another anomaly was the situation of people who retired from academia and took their pensions and then found that in some years these provided the majority of their income while in other years more money was derived from their on-going income-generating activities (such as consultancies) which oscillated between busy and quiet periods. The surveys prompted more than one enquiry from prospective participants as to which survey they should complete, and the interviews also threw up several cases of individuals who found the question 'Do you describe yourself as retired?' difficult to answer straightforwardly. The preferred designation of one interviewee who remained very active academically after formal retirement was 'paid by the pension fund' (interviewee 37). Another described how 'I basically say I'm now a full-time writer, before that I had an academic career... For some reason bringing up the word "retired" I find odd, because in any classic sense I'm not retired' (interviewee 24).

Professors are one of five groups selected by the sociologist Michelle Silver (2018) to illustrate the phenomenon of people who continue to work even though they are no longer obliged to do so (whether for financial or other reasons). There are numerous well-known figures in the academic world who have continued their work-related endeavours in a dedicated fashion well beyond the point at which they could have brought them to a close. Crow (2020g) identifies Norbert Elias and Robert Merton as two academics (both sociologists) who were remarkably productive for decades after formally retiring in their 60s (both lived to be over 90), while in the case of the academic and social entrepreneur Michael Young (who died in his later 80s) one of many on-going activities was researching the meaning of life after work and disputing the various rationales advanced for a compulsory retirement age (Young and Schuller 1991: 7-8). In the words of his biographer, Young 'never stopped working' (Briggs 2001: 313). One participant in the current study noted that many academics find it 'extremely difficult to "wind down" and "let go"' (interviewee 2), acknowledging that the only practical changes brought by 'retirement' might be a changed job title (e.g. from Professor to Emeritus Professor) and no longer being paid. Some others resisted even these changes as they continued to be employed full-time into their 70s and 80s. An interviewee who had worked at their institution for over 50 years and was still employed full-time reported feeling 'deeply ambivalent' (interviewee 44) about the prospect of retirement. Obituaries convey the sense that, prior to the changes in the law

in 2011 that facilitated greater flexibility regarding retirement age, others would have welcomed the opportunity to stay employed. The obituary for the microbiologist Denis Mitchison revealed that formal retirement from his Professorial post in his mid-sixties was followed by energetic pursuit of his research for decades, even if at the age of 90 he eased up a little, deciding as he put it 'to take Mondays off' (Reisz 2018). The observation made of Young that the word 'retirement did not exist in his vocabulary' (Briggs 2001: 313) clearly applies more broadly; it did, for example, to the interviewee who, for a time at least, had spoken only of 'the R word', treating it as something taboo, because as he expressed it academic work is 'part of who I am' (interviewee 16).

If later life work patterns are hard to differentiate from those that preceded them for some academics, for others 'retirement' marks a clean break. One interviewee told the story of a former colleague, a successful and well-published Professor, who announced on the day of his retirement that 'I am never going to think another academic thought'; having left work he was said to have devoted time to cultivating his garden, following in the footsteps of Voltaire's *Candide*. Inspired by this, the interviewee described himself as retired 'from day one', adding that after four decades in higher education 'I was *glad* to retire' (interviewee 28, emphasis in original). Another interviewee described a former colleague who retired at 60, 'and she gave up academia' (interviewee 19), turning her attention to markedly different activities in the voluntary sector. These stories were told respectfully, with admiration for the bravery of the decision to strike out in new directions, but a later interviewee told the story of the latter individual from a different perspective: 'She said "I'm having nothing more to do with academia at all"… I personally can't relate to that at all. I can only think you must have much else that you want to go to' (interviewee 40). A fourth interviewee could not imagine following the example of his former colleague who had told him that she 'was stopping dead, she just said "that's it, I'm stopping", and I remember saying to her that I would find that quite difficult' (interviewee 33). Another interviewee was keen that her prospective retirement did not resemble 'falling off a cliff' (interviewee 17), a theme echoed in separate discussions of the preference to 'ramp down rather than go off a cliff edge' (interviewee 51) and 'the idea of retirement as a cliff edge' (interviewee 36) which was acknowledged to be a danger (especially, in this interviewee's opinion, for men), and the 'glass cliff' (interviewee 38) which referred to the tendency for women's position to be disadvantaged. Cliffs also feature in the wider literature on career endings, academic and other (Lodge and Carnell 2014: ch.2; Snyder 1998).

Of the retired survey participants 92 (58%) were undertaking voluntary work, and for 23 (25%) of these this work did not draw on their academic skills and experience, thereby representing a new endeavour, away from their former lives as university employees. Furthermore, nearly half (79 [49%]) of the retired survey participants reported spending a lot more time since retirement on interests unrelated to their academic work, such as music, gardening, art and travel, and only 21 (13%) spent no more time on these things. Of the 92 (58%) who had grandchildren under 16 the majority (50 [54%]) devoted time to looking after them, while 32 (20%) of the retired survey respondents had other caring responsibilities. Overall, 20 (12%) of retired survey participants agreed with the statement that 'Retired academics need to make a "clean break" from work and treat retirement as a

fresh start', a sentiment with which 11 (14%) of working survey participants concurred. This was also the view of several interviewees, such as the one for whom retirement 'is a new chapter, perhaps described as the closing of one door and the opening of others. I see it as an opportunity to start afresh and reinvigorate… It is simply moving on to a different challenge' (interviewee 25). Another interviewee expressed the opinion that 'we have incredibly talented colleagues and they are talented academically but that also often hides talents in other areas and it may be that the clean break enables them to pursue other interests or talents' (interviewee 26); he did not, however, envisage his own future following such a path.

The two extremes of continuing in full-time academic employment beyond state retirement age and of retiring and making a clean break from all things academic represent minority patterns at opposite ends of a spectrum, between which the majority of retired or semi-retired academics find themselves continuing with some elements of the job (both intellectual and financial) but with less intensity. In terms of contacts with colleagues in the academic world, 46 (29%) retired survey respondents reported having plenty, a further 86 (53%) some, and only 8 (5%) not nearly enough; a further 21 (13%) did not want such contact, consistent with the 'clean break' perspective. In terms of reading academic journals and books, retired survey respondents ranged from the 34 (21%) who read hardly any or none to the 12 (8%) who read *more* than they had prior to retirement, with 54 (34%) reading about the same as before retirement and 60 (38%) fewer (but more than 'hardly any'). Respondents who had continued elements of paid work for universities after formally retiring were nearly as numerous (76 [47%]) as those who stopped all such work (85 [53%]). For 30 of these 76 (that is, 19% of all retired survey respondents), this arrangement had continued for more than 5 years, thereby illustrating the 'gradual' or 'phased' nature of the retirement process. Indeed, this figure of 30 probably understates the extent to which some paid work with universities will be kept up for more than five years, because the survey included participants not yet five years into their retirement who may stay working for longer than the 1-5 year category that they indicated reflected their situation at the time of the survey. The percentage of people continuing some paid work with universities post-retirement is lower than that in Tizard and Owen's study, which reported that 'On retiring, 60% were re-employed in a university, their own or another, all but 4% (who obtained full-time jobs abroad) on a part-time, usually one-third basis. Those who retired early were more likely to be re-employed' (2001: 256). This difference may reflect changes in the interim, such as the move away from compulsory retirement ages and the greater control over the retirement process that this has brought to individuals. The more general point is that both in the later 1990s (when Tizard and Owen collected their data) and currently, retirement from university work is typically a gradual process rather than an event occurring at a single moment. A further commonality relates to Tizard and Owen's observation that 'Many of our respondents commented that they had not "retired"' (2001: 254), a theme to which we will return in section 3 c) below on evolving academic identities.

The characterisation of retirement as a drawn-out process rather than a single point in time is further supported by data from the survey of people for whom work was the main source of their income. At the time of the survey nearly three quarters of these were working full-

time (59 [74%]) but asked whether they anticipated retiring from a full- or part-time post a slight majority (41 [51%]) indicated part-time, and a further 7 (9%) were undecided. Employees' entitlement to request a shift to a fractional contract as a way of managing the retirement process was something about which some interviewees showed both awareness and an appetite to consider. As one put it, 'At the moment I'm employed 100% and I probably work 120%, I might come down to 50% and work 75% and do the parts of the 120% that are more fun than the other parts' (interviewee 53). A retired interviewee recounted how their situation had evolved:

> 'And I retired in, well I retired from full-time work in [year redacted], I was 62... I worked on a part-time basis for probably another 5 years, I should think. It's difficult to track as there were bits of everything really, in that period…. I did all sorts of research things that one does, and teaching. But then decided, in some ways it was decided for me, but I decided… that was the time to make a clean break, and invest my interests elsewhere' (interviewee 4).

This was not the only interviewee for whom a break with academia came several years after formal retirement and a period in which an on-going relationship with their former employer had been cultivated. A variety of reasons lay behind such relationships proving difficult to sustain, including COVID-19 in some of the more recent cases; for others, changes of staff in key positions at the university meant that vital personal points of connection were lost, or the more general process of declining numbers of staff with whom they had worked still being in post. In the case of interviewee 4 quoted above, this was speeded up by the closure of their former department.

Consultancy represented a further element of on-going activity for retired survey participants besides teaching and research, with 64 (41%) reporting having undertaken consultancy work in the last 12 months, and a quarter of these had devoted at least a month of their time to it. A retired interviewee was still active as a consultant 'from time to time' a decade on from formal retirement from his university when he had been 64, describing himself as 'semi-retired' and 'gradually working towards full retirement' (interviewee 50). Another had moved from a university post to full-time consultancy at an earlier age, and had continued with that long-term, latterly tapering down to retiring from it altogether in his 70s, though still doing 'bits and pieces' of research and writing 'that still use my academic skills, but I do it on my own whim and at my own pace' (interviewee 43). An interviewee who was still working full-time had built up a profile as a consultant which could provide a financial cushion, a focus of on-going activity and facilitate early retirement: 'various things could work out over the next 5 years which would mean I could be in a position that I could go down to 20% if not fully retire by the time I'm 60' (interviewee 51). Other types of paid employment besides consultancies had been undertaken by 35 (22%) of the retired survey participants in the past year, including research for television documentaries, travel writing, software design, private medical practice, working for a biotech company, and paid trustee and steering committee roles.

As was noted above, the majority of the retired survey participants (92 [58%]) reported currently undertaking voluntary work, with 17 (18%) of these devoting more than 20 hours a

week to this. This volunteering included Citizens' Advice Bureau work, working in a food bank, community work, mountain rescue, acting as a tourist guide, heritage and conservation work, work with museums, with libraries, with learned societies, with churches, with music groups, with sports clubs, with asylum seekers and translation, with political parties, with gardening groups, with the Women's Institute, with the University of the Third Age, and with a citizen's jury. Several participants also mentioned that the work undertaken for their former universities was voluntary; of the 73 who had undertaken teaching for universities in the last year, 46 (63%) had done so without any payment. For those 122 who had undertaken research work in association with their universities in the last year, three quarters (92 [75%]) had done so without payment. A similarly diverse pattern of voluntary work was reported by retired interviewees. One in his mid-70s said that he did 'a range of voluntary things. I'm a trustee of a Youth Trust… and I'm also a visiting inspector for [a] regulating body' (interviewee 46). Another reported being 'a volunteer for the [name redacted] Museum… I'm in there a day a week, and I also volunteer for the RSPB' (interviewee 13). A third highlighted that she was 'involved with the Red Cross' (interviewee 30), working in particular with refugees. A fourth found retirement from academia freed her to be 'able to be an advisor to Scottish Government' and an 'advisor on various voluntary sector/third sector bodies' (interviewee 10).

An interviewee who was soon to retire considered herself spoilt for choice in terms of the voluntary activity she might pursue:

> 'I quite like the idea of looking at my skills and thinking "what can I do?". So for a period of time I thought I might apply be a magistrate, and I still might do that…. A friend of mine since she's retired has been two days a week as a Citizens' Advice Bureau advisor…. The other thing I've thought about is doing things like the clinical commission groups, the local clinical commission groups or being a non-exec director of a trust…. There's a whole load of things that I can apply my skills to, without it being for the University' (interviewee 6).

This echoed a retired interviewee's account of how prior to retirement she 'wrote out a table of all the things I could do in retirement, it was quite lengthy' (interviewee 31). Another interviewee opined that a gendered influence was in operation here such that 'women when they retire tend to throw themselves into alternative activities: social activities, charitable activities, voluntary organisations, etc., with more gusto than men do. Men seem to be content to, not necessarily do academic stuff, but to sit at home and read and, you know, pass the time' (interviewee 11). This opinion was not strongly supported by the survey data, which showed 59 (54%) of respondents identifying as male and 30 (63%) of respondents identifying as female currently involved in volunteering (as did the one person who did not identify as either male or female). Nor did gender emerge as a particularly marked differentiating factor in relation to the question of whether retirement had led to a lot more time being devoted to other active interests and hobbies; among retired survey participants it had for 55% of women but also 45% of men. One of the latter had used the time to build a collection of '15 stringed instruments' and 'found other musicians to play with and had a lot of fun' (RIFE#59). Among interviewees yet to retire a woman envisaged

that she 'might take up and play my French horn again' (interviewee 17) and a man mentioned running and wanting 'to have more time to do that' (interviewee 51).

The interviewee who commented that 'retirement for academics is a bit more blurred than for many professions' (interviewee 13) offers a nice summary of what academic retirement looks like. A section of the interviews was devoted to consideration of 34 visual representations of retirement https://www.academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk/images/ that had been selected from the free on-line source of visual images Pexels for interviewees to access on-line prior to the interview and then to comment upon. Asked whether any of these images resonated with their notions of retirement, several responded that they were left unengaged. For these participants, responses were along the lines of 'They didn't mean anything to me at all. Nothing' (interviewee 19); 'What they did for me was to give me an overwhelming feeling that I didn't quite fit in anywhere' (interviewee 24); 'Lots of them aren't me' (interviewee 6); 'If you ask me what these images mean to me, I would not say "retirement" for any of them' (interviewee 7); 'I'm a very visual person actually but they didn't resonate with me at all really' (interviewee 43); 'I don't think any of these relate to me very well' (interviewee 45); 'Many of these images are attractive, but no one encapsulates how I feel about retirement' (interviewee 38); and, most forcefully, 'I find them all horrid!... None of them particularly provide catalysts for thought' (interviewee 14). For this group, whatever retirement might look like, these images were not it.

Further responses developed the theme that it was easier to specify images of retirement that did not apply than ones that did. Some reactions were to specific images such as image 15 which included balls of wool: 'I'm not going to do any knitting, that's definitely not on the table' (interviewee 12); 'Something I particularly dislike is craft. The idea of any kind of sewing or anything fills me with horror [laughs]' (interviewee 36); 'Hobbies, no. can't see myself doing that' (interviewee 51); 'I do not want to be a retiree that goes to pottery classes' (interviewee 6); 'number 4 with the old man sitting, I don't want to be that person, I'm not anywhere near that' (interviewee 30). Images taken to be associated with passivity prompted consistent objections: 'One or two certainly struck me as being negative. The one of the building site with "slow down" [image 30], as if you're going to get the pipe and slippers and not do anything…. slumped in front of Coronation Street' (interviewee 33); 'One of them I didn't buy into was the one that had a stop sign on it [image 1], and in one way or another a lot of the images… didn't seem particularly positive… putting your feet up and do[ing] nothing' (interviewee 16); 'I want to go on doing things rather than want to sort of stop and sit in my easy chair' (interviewee 44); 'Although I describe myself as retired, I don't see myself as somebody doing nothing' (interviewee 30).

Image 5, of a diary without anything entered into it, was another expression of inactivity for several, both those yet to retire and those that had. For those looking ahead, it was not what they wanted or could envisage: 'I don't want an empty diary' (interviewee 6); 'I can't imagine ever having an empty diary' (interviewee 34); 'I can't imagine having an empty diary…. feeling worthless and time stretching ahead…. I just never feel like that' (interviewee 38); 'I don't think I'd have an empty diary' (interviewee 48); 'No, no, mine will be full' (interviewee 47). For those already retired, it did not match their experience: 'That didn't

seem to reflect my life as I live it [laughs]' (interviewee 37); 'The empty diary is the opposite to me, I thought' (interviewee 43); 'Not the empty diary, not at all, that had no appeal' (interviewee 32). For another retired interviewee 'that one resonated with me and not in a good way, I don't see an empty diary as an opportunity but as a burden' (interviewee 31), which linked to the view that it evoked 'a fear of the diary being completely empty, and you lose a sense of time' (interviewee 35). The idea of retirement being associated with people having time on their hands was emphatically rejected.

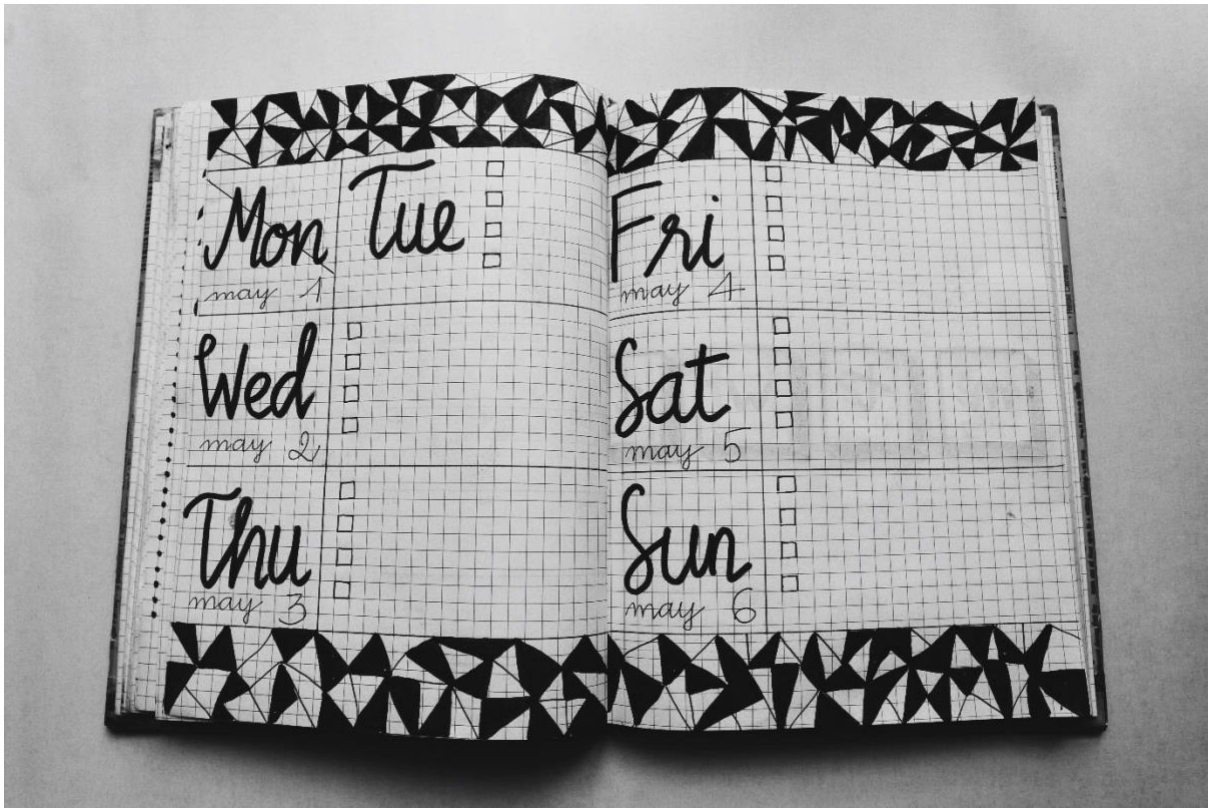

Image 1. White and black weekly planner (Bich Tran).

There was, nevertheless, some recognition that retirement from a busy job might carry the risk of time hanging heavily if steps were not taken to prevent such an outcome:

> 'Number 5 did something for me.'
>
> Interviewer: 'That's the empty diary.'
>
> 'Yes, that was to do with…. my sense that it was very important to structure the time of retirement or the time of the lockdown. One of the key issues in thinking about retirement for me was that I was anxious about the notion of it as an unstructured, featureless, unvariegated space of time…. Having been someone who always worked with a diary, with a plan of the weeks ahead term by term, I knew when it came to retirement I would need to invent a comparable structure and I put a lot of effort into doing that' (interviewee 49).

In some cases, continuing the practice of keeping a diary provided a reassuring sense of purpose, as it did for the person whose working life had been governed by a diary that 'used to look absolutely shocking' because it had been so full:

> 'Actually the one that spoke to me, although it's not me, I could see it as a fear, was the empty diary. I still maintain a paper diary and I fill it in every day and that made me think, am I filling it in to convince myself I have a lot of stuff on, I'm doing things, putting in doctor's appointments and board meetings and so on, what I'm watching on television, etc.?' (interviewee 28).

Interviewee 33 concurred that 'one of the things I think it's quite important to do in retirement is to keep a diary, even if you're just writing in things that you, you're meeting people for coffee or lunch or whatever; the fact it's empty looks to me like you don't have any friends'. Another acknowledged that 'Too much free time and too much of an empty diary can be scary', but went on to describe how it could also have some attraction:

> 'I don't have an empty diary [laughs]. But then, because my diary gets like that, that's why I think ebbs and flows for me, because my diary gets like that, then every now and then I'm rather relieved when it gets to a bit when it's empty and I think, "ahhh, nothing that week". Then the next thing I know I'll start filling it up and then it gets full again and it's like, "what happened to that diary week?"' (interviewee 40).

The value of having a pause or breathing space was recognised: 'I would not want a calendar that's completely free, I want something in it, I want to see people, for instance. But, at the same time, I just want to breathe, sometimes' (interviewee 9). Interviewee 40 referred to the related idea of 'headspace'. The option of escaping from the sometimes relentless nature of schedules was therefore valued.

For others the concern was less with how full the diary was than with who controlled the process of managing it. As one expressed it,

> 'My feeling about diaries is that I'm the person who fills the diary. I'm not required to go to meetings, that was the worst thing about being head of department, your life is not your own at all. That's the great thing about retirement, you have that amazing control of your diary. That's a great feeling. Compared with the academic life nowadays, I mean it must be getting worse and worse, more and more time is spent on Zoom calls and other obligations that you can't get out of' (interviewee 52).

Another retired interviewee was positive about being more in control of his time than he had been prior to retirement:

> Interviewer: 'You have 5 in that list, which is an empty diary; so are you seeing that as a positive thing?'
>
> 'Yes! Exactly! I'll be free to fill it with things I want to fill it with.'
>
> Interviewer: 'Oh, that's interesting, some people have been horrified by the image of the empty diary.'

> ‘I still have a work diary which I use, in fact I’m consulting it right now, for the numbers. If several days look empty, I’m actually not at all unhappy because it means I can spend time on my hobbies or do reading, casual reading not professional reading, so I have no problem at all with days which are completely clear of any commitment…. The fact that my diary is now pretty empty…. I’m quite happy with that situation’ (interviewee 50).

More than one interviewee detected ambiguity in the images, and the empty diary provided a good example of that. Other interpretations of the image besides purposelessness were available, including taking time out from busy schedules to recharge one’s batteries, and regaining control over one’s scheduling, captured in the liking for ‘those weeks where you look at the blank pages where things calm down in the academic cycle’ (interviewee 34). Nor were attitudes necessarily fixed; the interviewee who recounted ‘Some days I think I wish my diary was empty, but when I get to a day where it is empty I think, “what am I going to do?”’ (interviewee 46) touched on the rhythmical nature of time and routines, as well as the relative merits of planning ahead compared to spontaneity.

Other images associated with ambiguity were two of railway tunnels, one taken from the inside looking out (image 33) and the other from outside looking in (image 34). One interviewee with retirement ahead of her commented ‘light at the end of the tunnel, I like that. You could interpret that in two ways, you know, the light at the end of the tunnel is your retirement or there is one on the right it’s sort of “Oh my God that’s sort of, that’s the end”’ (interviewee 12). Another interviewee yet to retire accentuated the positive: ‘Heading into a dark tunnel or heading towards the light. I’m an optimist and I’m a happy person so I always think of going into the light with almost anything I’m doing’ (interviewee 51). Optimism about retirement also underpinned the comment ‘The ones with the tunnels to me they look like anticipation of fun things further down the line, both of them’ (interviewee 47), but another interviewee, also not yet retired, was ‘reminded… of the joke that Laurie Taylor did in the Times Higher a few years ago, “Is that light at the end of the tunnel? No, it’s some bastard with a torch bringing me more work”, and that’s how I saw that’ (interviewee 26). A retired interviewee echoed this by saying about image 33, ‘I don’t know what the light is, it could be, in the words of an old joke, the light of an oncoming train’ (interviewee 3). Another found the tunnel images ‘nicely ambiguous’ with various connotations of journeys to different destinations and went on to remark, ‘I don’t regard my recent career as a tunnel in any way. It was a hard shift, I loved the work, but I just had to stop and I could see all sorts of possibilities opening out beyond’ (interviewee 31). A third captured the ambiguity by saying about the two images, ‘There’s still plenty of light at the end, but it can seem a long way off’ (interviewee 23). A more definite recollection was ‘Light at the end of the tunnel images are definitely what I felt at the point I took early retirement’ (interviewee 42), with mention made of the reduction in stress that accompanied the change. A fifth was more philosophical, being prompted by the tunnel images to think of ‘the phase of later life as an opportunity for spiritual growth and development, and that wasn’t something I had a lot of time for, when I was in full-time work’ (interviewee 36). This comment, and the majority of the others prompted by the tunnels, was made to accentuate the positive aspects of retirement.

Accentuation of the positive was not to be confused with romanticised images for some interviewees. One retired interviewee objected to the way in which 'In retirement planning brochures the images are often of a couple with very good teeth and beautifully coiffed hair, and they are often on a beach or a cruise or something… That image doesn't do it for me…. Certainly not being perfect! That's just not me' (interviewee 31). For another, who still spent a lot of time in what he referred to as his office/laboratory, images 'of people sitting around having a happy time, that leaves me a bit cold' (interviewee 21). An interviewee not yet retired likewise criticised 'images that present a view of the old, or old age as a time of great excitement…. It's too chipper' (interviewee 9). Others wanted less attractive aspects of the ageing process to be acknowledged in visions of retirement. One was reminded by image 4 of a solitary, pensive figure that 'growing old is also part of retirement and that it is not always a pleasurable experience, especially as health problems for yourself and those around you seem to loom large' (interviewee 42), and another recounted how news of peers' illnesses instilled 'increasing uncertainty of how long before ageing really catches up with you' (interviewee 45). A third commented that 'We maybe need to recognise that we're not going to have the adventures that we would have had in our forties if we hadn't been working' (interviewee 10), and a fourth responded to image 13 by saying 'I like the highland scene. I've done a lot of hillwalking in the past, but the hill behind looked a bit too steep for me nowadays' (interviewee 32). A fifth was less concerned about the prospect of 'feeling like you are being put out to pasture' (interviewee 34), but a sixth was prompted to observe that 'health and wealth' are preconditions for making 'a reasonable fist of living in your nineties' (interviewee 39), influenced by having seen a much-admired academic struggling as a nonagenarian to deliver a presentation. This echoed two stories told by other interviewees. One was about

> 'an exceptionally talented person with great analytical lucidity and critical powers but at a certain stage, maybe 79, her memory became weak and she said she would look at books and not remember having read them nor why she'd made the marks in them she did, and so she cut off totally after that. Physical decay can lead to people giving up' (interviewee 1).

The other concerned witnessing a public debate involving an eminent linguistics professor 'who was obviously very hard of hearing and seemed distant in the discussion' (interviewee 7), which prompted the interviewee to be explicit about his use of a hearing aid when participating in such fora. This theme of how academics deal with the ageing process will be returned to below in section 3c.

Images of the future are vulnerable to fantasy which may be in tension with more realistic assessments of ageing. Image 13 of the isolated cottage in Glencoe had wide appeal, and prompted one interviewee to recount how

> 'I had this notion that when we retired we'd go to the country and I would look after donkeys, a donkey sanctuary, and that was our initial plan and I went off and did a donkey care course as well. But we couldn't sell our house at the time or we couldn't find what we wanted, so that's still something that every few months we look at what properties are for sale and can we get something with an acre, and get

a couple of old donkeys, so that's something that's still, this notion of living an idyllic rural life. Having said that, also, as we get older we're aware we also have to be fairly near services, so, there will come a point where I say I couldn't get young donkeys because they live for about 40 years and I don't have 40 years left in me to look after donkeys. So there are practical things, but I can go down and help out with a wee donkey sanctuary' (interviewee 30).

Image 2. White and gray house on green field (Jonas Togo).

The same image of rural isolation also caught the eye of an interviewee still working, who though it may be 'more appealing to academics during their career than perhaps at the end, the idea of managing to get away from it all, to escape, to enable you to do the work that you should be doing that your actual job prevents you from doing. That's quite appealing now, actually' (interviewee 26). The theme of retirement allowing academics to get away from negative aspects of their working lives included interviewees escaping 'the relentless pressure to publish' (interviewee 17) and, in response to image 29 ('Time for change'), enjoying the 'opportunity to do some new things and some different things that I literally thought I hadn't got time for in the past because I had to finish the next book' (interviewee

49). Another was prompted by image 26 ('Less is more') to enthuse about 'less admin., less meetings, more writing, teaching, thinking, I like that! That's ideally what I want my retirement to be' (interviewee 35). The bookshop (image 19) was the most popular image, picked out by more than a third of interviewees, whose association of it with retirement providing more time for reading (or, in one case, listening to audio books) was universally favourable. And interviewee 12 spoke for many others besides by choosing images 'that are about opportunity, possibility' as the most appropriate to associate with retirement. The words 'opportunities' and 'possibilities' were among those most frequently associated with approval (notably opportunities for travel), just as 'passivity' and 'inactivity' were commonly associated with negativity (as was noted earlier).

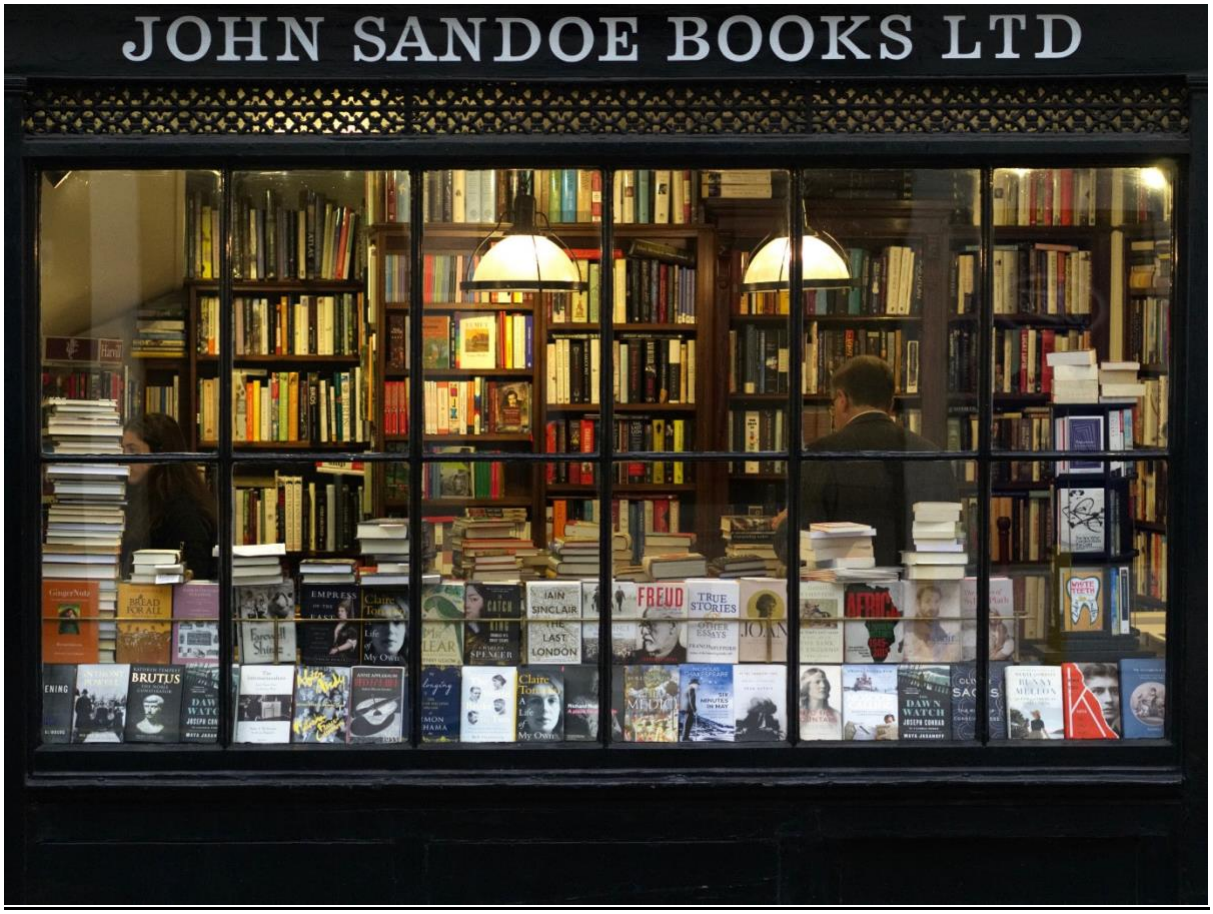

Image 3: bookshop (Tuur Tisseghem)

3.b) Is there a right time to retire?

If one big question facing later career academics is *whether* to retire, another (for most of them) is the question of *when* to retire, or at least when to initiate that process. The majority of the survey participants and of the interviewees had retired, at least according to the definition of retirement being used in this study, and most of those study participants who were still working had given some consideration to the timing of retirement. It was noted above in 2.b) i) that 35 (22%) of the retired respondents were 67 or older at the point of retirement, while 21 (13%) had retired before the age of 60; the majority (105 [65%]) had retired between the ages of 60 and 66. It was also noted that, somewhat surprisingly, this had not varied markedly by gender. Nearly two-thirds (106 [66%]) considered that they had retired at the right time, while 8 (5%) would have preferred an earlier retirement date and 33 (21%) a later one, the remainder expressing ambiguity or uncertainty on the issue. Of the 26 respondents who indicated that they would have liked to have kept working until 70 or older, for the majority (18 [69%]) this implied that they would have preferred at least 4 more years in post. For the 81 survey respondents still working, 15 (19%) anticipated being aged 71 or older when they retired, and only 21 (26%) thought that they would retire at 66 or earlier, with 28 (35%) identifying an age between 67-70 as their expected point of retirement; a further 17 (21%) were currently undecided. These expected retirement ages would have been higher had COVID-19 not brought about a reconsideration of the issue for just over a quarter (22 [27%]) of the respondents, all but 4 of whom had reduced their expected retirement age as a result of the pandemic. The majority thought that they would have moved to working part-time by the point at which they retired, although only just over a quarter (22 [27%]) envisaged that they would stop paid work completely as soon as they retired. More common was the expectation that the point of formal retirement would be followed by consultancy, research, mentoring, and teaching and examining, along with a wide variety of other paid positions. Most typically this was envisaged as continuing for 1-5 years after formal retirement.

Among the working survey participants, more than 9 out of 10 (74 [91%]) anticipated unpaid academic activity would feature post-retirement, and again 1-5 years was the most typical anticipated time frame, although 17 (23% of these 74) were currently undecided about how long they might continue with such work. The majority anticipated spending ‘a lot more time’ on non-academic foci, including the sorts of things already familiar from the retired survey respondents’ activities reported in 3.a) above, such as time with family members, volunteering, travel, exercise, craft and cultural activities, studying for further qualifications, learning languages, and environmental and political activism. Sometimes these anticipated futures were idyllic (‘Smallholding with pigs, chickens, vegetable gardening and a small wood’), one was pleasingly alliterative (‘grandchildren, gardening and golf’), and one involved the frank admission that this would be a work in progress (‘I have few real interests apart from my work so I will have to develop some’). Another was extensive in her ambitions to the point of exhaustiveness, following a list of 11 diverse activities with the comment ‘and hopefully more interests that I haven’t yet discovered’.

The prospect described by the working survey participants was predominantly one of a gradual process of retirement of which they were in control, or at least over which they were able to exercise a degree of influence (a process described by interviewee 2 as 'a suitable tapering down', by interviewee 9 as 'a gradual distancing rather than an abrupt end', and interviewee 41 as 'the slow down process'). It would, they envisaged, unfold over several years, involving a move from full-time to part-time employment and maintenance of appropriate contact with their colleagues and their institution after formally retiring. The majority anticipated serving on project advisory boards (55 [68%]), writing articles and books (52 [64%]), refereeing papers and grant applications (49 [60%]), and continuing with paid research and consultancy (44 [54%]). Smaller numbers anticipated that they would be attending conferences (37 [46%]), serving on editorial boards (30 [37%]), and the numbers who anticipated carrying on with supervision, teaching and examination were smaller still. The majority expected to enjoy continued access to university libraries and email, and almost a third (26 [32%]) thought that they would be granted access to shared office space. Only 11 (14%) did not expect to be offered any facilities at all.

Although a majority of working survey respondents envisaged being either as contented with life once they had retired as they were currently (25 [31%]) or more contented (19 [24%]), 10 (12%) thought that they would be less contented and the largest group (27 [33%]) felt themselves currently unable to answer, suggesting that for them the nature of retirement was as yet something of an unknown quantity. The retired respondent who commented that retirement 'comes as something of an unprepared-for shock' revealed the prudence of this perspective. Among the retired survey respondents 85 (53%) reported being more content with life as a consequence of retiring, and 61 (38%) were as content as they had been when working, but 10 (6%) were less content and the remaining 5 (3%) felt unable to say. These findings may be taken to indicate a broadly benign picture of retirement for academics, associated with quality of life being either maintained or improved, but they also suggest that retirement for some may be associated with personal troubles and public issues, to use Mills's (2000: ch.1) classic terminology. Although only a minority of participants presented retirement as inferior to working life, their concerns nevertheless deserve attention alongside accounts such as those of the contented survey respondents who declared 'Mine was an ideal retirement. I couldn't have improved it', and 'At age 68 I just feel "the time is right"'.

Mills famously described contemporary people's unease regarding their circumstances and sense of feeling trapped, and their loss of connection to 'cherished values' (2000: 4). Such emotions shone through in the accounts of those study participants who felt that they had been or would be denied control over the process of retirement and, in particular, the decision about the age at which they retired. Several survey participants were keen to point out that the policy move away from a fixed retirement age had not been adopted by all universities (e.g. the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews), and Employer Justified Retirement Ages were a source of profound dissatisfaction. One respondent who elaborated on this theme 'deplored Universities with EJRAs that are a stupid waste of later-life talent on spurious grounds of "blocking posts"'; he described how despite maintaining a record of success in winning research grants he had been '"sacked" on age grounds', and

expressed the view that this was the most important issue raised by the project: 'If your survey does anything useful it will be to force EJRAs to end', thereby rectifying 'forced retirement by a University that refuses to accept "no age discrimination"'. Others noted more succinctly (but not necessarily any less passionately) that 'Cambridge has compulsory retirement for academics at age 67', 'Retirement in my university is compulsory at 67. I have held [Research Council name redacted] grants for the 8 years since. No salary', and 'I was made to retire at 67 even though I have a 5 year [Research Council name redacted] research grant'. One working survey participant noted that his university's EJRA 'is enforced with vigour'. The survey of retired academics included people at other universities who had reached fixed retirement ages prior to the change in the law, and several of these indicated unhappiness about this: 'I didn't have any choice about my retirement at 65 but would have liked to have carried on a bit longer'; 'I HAD to retire at 65 (this was in 2003)'; 'I was required to retire at 65 prior to the Equalities Act'; 'I was forced to retire as [it was] before the EU regulations came into force. As a principal lecturer I was at the top of the pay scale and management wanted to get rid of older staff to replace with younger, cheaper staff'. For such people, much to their frustration, they had not had control over when they retired.

Altogether, 23 (15%) of the retired survey respondents reported pressure from their department or university to retire as an influence on their decision about when to retire (compared to only 1 [1%] who reported pressure from the same quarter to stay on). The former group included people who felt 'forced out in a devious way', 'hounded out', 'pushed out', 'forced… to retire', 'forced out in an underhand way which I will never forgive the university for'; another lamented that 'my department effectively "kicked me out"'. The respondent who said 'I wanted to continue working but it was made very clear that I was not welcome to stay on' thus spoke for a wider group. Among interviewees, a small number reported being unprepared for retirement as a result of unexpected pressure to resign, or in some cases redundancy procedures. One Director of a large Centre recounted how things changed rapidly when 'a new VC [Vice Chancellor] came along, the agreements I had with the finance director changed and… the whole thing started to crumble… What happened in [name of university redacted] is unbelievable, some of the things that went on there. People being made redundant and all sorts' (interviewee 14). Another senior figure's narrative also revolved around leadership changes: 'When Principals change in universities, strategies change…. I must have pissed them off somewhere, I imagine. So I retired in [date redacted], it was 10 months earlier than I planned to do' (interviewee 28).

For some interviewees the termination of their contracts was experienced as part of a group: 'Everything was in flux and changing and I think there was about 6 of us retiring on the same day… Getting us all out at the same time. It was a miserable experience… I felt it was like a system that was expelling us. We were expelled'. Had the process been less rushed, he felt that he 'might have been able to prepare a little more…. and think a little more clearly to what retirement would mean' (interviewee 35). This interviewee had been based at a post-1992 university, but his story was matched by another from an 'old' university: 'They were very keen to get rid of us [laughs]. I mean we were a rather old department… in sense of the profile of the staff. And so about half the staff, you know, a lot of us had been there since the 70's, so a lot of us retired about the same time… I didn't take

it personally but… they were pleased to see us go [laughs]' (interviewee 11). A variation on these stories of collective pressure was provided by the Professor who, along with two professorial colleagues, was told that the three of them would have to compete for the one post that would remain after proposed re-structuring of their academic unit. This came 'completely out the blue', and the interviewee's decision not to compete for the post necessitated deciding at speed what sort of life would follow employment at the university, settling on carving out a new career as a 'freelance academic' (interview 15). In another case, pressure to retire was resisted successfully: 'the university was really quite keen to get rid of me so they offered me a very generous VRCS [voluntary redundancy scheme] to get rid of me, but I said, "No I'm not all that keen to go into retirement just yet"' (interviewee 21), and he stayed working for another seven years full-time, a further 3 part-time, and longer still in a less formal capacity.

A different reason for retirement having to be adjusted to unexpectedly involved episodes of physical ill-health. Such episodes could be transformative of a person's outlook, as in the case of the interviewee who in their late fifties:

> 'got ill in [year redacted]… they let me have summer term off, but actually I was non-functional… the only thing I could do technically was retire… In truth I had never in my life thought about retirement. So I wasn't one of those people – and I know a number of people like this now [laughs] - who spend all their working life itching for retirement, it never entered my mind. And I would have been somebody who just went on and on. But I couldn't really. It was all very serious for three years, I mean it was touch and go whether I was going to live' (interviewee 19).

Another interviewee retired earlier than anticipated following an episode of ill-health which made her reconsider the merits of working 60 hours a week, and although the subsequent diagnosis was not as serious as initially feared, 'it gave me enough of a scare that I thought I really needed to stop working at this pace… You think you're invincible and in perfect health until suddenly you realise you're not. It's a shock to the system!' (interviewee 31). A third interviewee also had her outlook changed by illness:

> 'Health is a big thing and I probably thought before I had all these health problems that I'd go on forever. But with the health problems it has made me think that life is finite, and I've been fortunate to recover well, but I think that probably changed my mindset a bit… maybe brought forward the retirement… maybe brought it into a closer focus at an earlier point, because you don't really want to be one of these people that drops dead in harness' (interviewee 17).

The comment that 'I suffered a severe illness in [year redacted], so it made the decision to retire from teaching very easy' (interviewee 7) was in a similar vein. Illness of partners or colleagues can also bring about such reappraisals. One interviewee's partner had become ill and subsequently died, after which 'the 60-hour weeks didn't have the same pull as they had previously' (interviewee 10). Another, whose partner had survived a health scare, reflected that 'When you get intimations of mortality it's entirely appropriate to think about the next 20 years…. You have to revaluate' (interviewee 4).

A further interviewee recalled ‘working with someone who was the Dean of the School at the time who had really poor health and it was a wake-up call’. At this epiphanal moment she realised that she ‘didn’t want to be the person that was leaving because of poor health. I didn’t want to retire then not be able to do other things so that was a very definite influence on me’ (interviewee 30).

In the course of the interviews participants were made aware of the facts that the average age of death people featured in the obituaries in the Times Higher during the 5 years from January 2015 was 75 and that 1 in 7 of these 256 people had died before they were 60 and a third before they were 70 (Crow 2020b). Even allowing for this group of people whose obituaries had been analysed not being a representative sample of academics, these were acknowledged to be sobering statistics and revealed cognisance of numerous ‘untimely’ deaths of former colleagues. One interviewee recounted how

> ‘We’ve had quite a history of deaths in our department recently, not of old people in every case, and I do think that the stresses and strains of a highly competitive institution – which is what universities have become – there are extraordinary workloads that people are carrying now if they’re going to be conscientious –has simply led people to have not sufficient hours of sleep, not sufficient rest, and that probably contributes to that third that you’re saying die under 70. I would be quite critical of universities in that respect, I think people are being put under extraordinary strain’ (interviewee 1).

Interestingly, the retired survey participants (over two thirds of whom are aged 70+ and who are, therefore, not a representative sample by virtue of being ‘survivors’) reported generally good health, with 71 (45%) never being prevented from doing what they want to do by health reasons, and a further 49 (31%) answering ‘not often’, leaving 28 (18%) saying ‘sometimes’ and 11 (7%) ‘often’. One of those who answered ‘never’ to this question looked back from her mid-70s, more than a decade on from retiring, and mused on having taken the right decision to leave behind an unsustainable situation:

> ‘Occasionally I look back on my working life and wish I was back there, but I don't miss the relentless demands of research, teaching, examining and administration. I seemed to be working 24/7 in the final 15 years of my career i.e. when I was managing a major research programme as well as my own big project within it. It made my name but it was exhausting’ (RIFE#3).

Quite possibly something similar might have been said of her as was said about one interviewee’s former colleague with whom there was an encounter ‘about 6 months after he retired, and [he] looked significantly younger than…. he did before he walked out the door’ (interviewee 28). Another interviewee expressed the view of retirement that ‘it does your health good on the whole’ (interviewee 11) by taking people out of pressurised working environments, although not everyone associated continued working with worse health (as will be seen below).

When reflecting on the issue of health and life expectancy some interviewees mentioned deaths of former colleagues from COVID-19, but more focussed on the discussion of

workplace pressure by describing academic jobs as 'pretty stressful' (interviewee 36), or 'a bit of a treadmill' (interviewee 27), and the observation was made that 'a sedentary lifestyle and stress is probably a bad combination' (interviewee 25). The emergence of audit culture was identified by several interviewees as a particularly problematic phenomenon. One former line manager recalled:

> 'suddenly that pressure came, everyone had targets, it became very target-based. Quite a lot of people have said to me when they are leaving, I'm just glad I won't have to watch the targets every day, waiting for the knock on the door, "how are you doing in meeting that target?"' (interviewee 28).

Another interviewee considered the possibility that the full effects of audit culture might take time to come out: 'I have known several people get into their early 70s and suddenly develop serious health problems, possibly because the nature of the job they have been doing is incredibly stressful'. This was illustrated by one of their former colleagues 'who had to have time off because they had a nervous breakdown, and that was simply because, we could all see it coming, but the amount of teaching he was being required to do, no one could keep that up'. Speaking more personally, the same interviewee continued

> 'If I was to summarise my last decade of working in Higher Education, it was always the feeling of never being good enough. That was what the job left me with. I was never good enough, I was never publishing enough, I was never teaching enough, I was never doing enough admin., I was never doing it properly, I was never *excellent* enough'
>
> Interviewer: 'Never bringing in enough money'.
>
> 'No! And I just got tired of it in the end…. This multiplying sense of your own inadequacy' (interviewee 39, emphasis in original).

A similar story of retiring from academia before the job's more negative aspects could take their toll on a person's physical and mental health was related by the interviewee who was conscious of having reached a tipping point:

> 'It was an active, conscious decision, that I should retire. Up until that point I hadn't wanted to. But I got to a point where I actually thought, "I don't want to be doing this any more". And a lot of that was the context. You know, "I've just had enough". And that was not so much the ideas and the research and the teaching, but just the whole University…. I enjoyed my work enormously. I flourished in it, in my view. But it got to the point where I ceased to be able to do, be what I wanted, so I just thought, "I'm going, I've had enough, I'm going". So that almost flipped in my head, that "I've had enough"…. It was that sort of feeling that this is just too much. I always had that thing where you could always divide your work into three areas. The stuff that you loved doing, that was really most rewarding; then there was stuff you were competent at, quite enjoyed doing it, it was fine, you didn't mind doing it; then there was the shit [laughs]. When that balance gets out of hand, you just go "Pffff!", you know? And I think that's what happened really. I call it the shit bit because I think it

began to feel like that. Being forced into doing things, which were just so unrewarding and unimaginative, really. You think why should I do this? I don't have to. And I was fortunate enough to [be able to] say, "I don't have to. I'm just going to go, and collect my pension. Aren't I lucky, really, lucky to have that choice?"' (interviewee 4).

These accounts highlight that consideration of how health feeds into decisions on the timing of retirement need to include not only episodes of ill-health but also broader feelings of balance and personal wellbeing.

Illness of the respondents or a family member was mentioned by 16 (11%) of the retired survey participants as one of the reasons for the timing of their retirement, in response to a question where they could identify more than one reason. This and the 23 (15%) who reported pressure to retire from their department or university (discussed above in relation to voluntary severance) are not the only negative factors that feature in the equation. Consistent with the interviewees' narratives just considered, stress and burnout were identified by 17 (11%), pressure from family to retire by 7 (5%), dissatisfaction with aspects of their immediate work situation by 19 (12%), and dissatisfaction with aspects of the culture/management of the institution as a whole by 36 (24%). These could all be interpreted as elements leading to what one interviewee described using the Scots dialect word '"scunnered", I've seen a lot of people "retired scunnered"' (interviewee 28). One meaning carried by this word is discontented due to something previously enjoyed becoming insufferable, distasteful or nauseating https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/scunner and the interviewee who described colleagues who had 'retired almost embittered with their working life, couldn't get out quickly enough' (interviewee 2) conveyed a similar idea, as did the interviewee who characterised one option for disillusioned academics whose world had lost its former meaning as 'sell the books and chuck it all in' (interviewee 54). These negative motivations underlying retirement remind us that the high levels of contentment with retirement reported earlier in this section may be a reflection of at least some retired survey participants having become *discontented* with work, or at least with employment and their employers.

The previous paragraph's figures from the retired survey respondents were generated using a question which allowed them to identify more than one reason for retiring when they did. It was therefore important to check whether the respondents indicating pressure from their department or university to retire were the same individuals that indicated dissatisfaction with aspects of their immediate work situation and/or dissatisfaction with aspects of the culture and management of the institution as a whole. It transpired that the overlap was not particularly extensive, with the result that no fewer than 59 (37%) of retired survey respondents identified one or more of these considerations. The additional 3 respondents who identified stress and burnout but none of these other things as a factor in their decision about retirement timing take the group who retired with a degree of unhappiness about some aspect of their relationship with their employer and/or colleagues to almost two in five (39%). The most extreme expression of unhappiness was the description in a retired survey participant's imagined future essay of her time working for her university as '33 years

of bondage' (RIFE#21), but the main part of the survey conveyed many other expressions of discontent. At a personal level these experiences included being overworked, having contributions undervalued, and being bullied. They extended more broadly to disapproval of 'the reducing sense of "collegiality" amongst staff', domination by 'rule-bound' procedures, and the general erosion of time-honoured academic values. All could lead to a growing feeling of being 'cheesed off', as one retired survey participant put it. Another's comment, 'I no longer wished to be part of a system whose standards have fallen so low', identified a public issue as well as a personal trouble, to use Mills's terms.

The interview context allowed participants to elaborate on such themes. One interviewee whose concerns about changes in universities having an adverse effect on health have already been noted went on to describe developments also providing the backdrop for a changed personal evaluation, lamenting

> 'the way working conditions for academics in universities have deteriorated quite markedly. You know the number of students you teach has increased, the number of resources has shrunk, you're constantly being made to jump through various hoops of accountability and I wasn't the only one who was getting tired of this and thinking well maybe it's time to leave… The squeeze really began to bite... Everything was about student evaluations. Anybody who was unpopular with students, their courses were cut. I found myself 67, 68 and I felt "how much longer do I want to go on working?" You know I've worked all my life, I've never been out of work, and how much of the job do I like? And that was the crucial thing, it shifted… it was maybe 70/30. 70% of my job I liked doing, but… that began to shift the other way round, really 20% of the job I liked doing, but I was fed up with the administration, the relentless accountability you had to offer for everything you do, and of course by then I'd paid off the mortgage, I was in a good final salary pension scheme. I looked at the figures and thought, there is no need for me to go on doing this, so I stopped' (interviewee 39).

In some interviewees' accounts, growing disillusion with the developing culture of managerialism (for interviewee 14 'rampant managerialism') was accentuated by their having taken on managerial roles that brought them direct experience of implementing the managerial philosophy:

> 'I took early retirement at the age of 60. You know, I was in a sort of senior management role, sort of equivalent of a Dean, and we just keep going through endless restructurings and the size of the tasks just got bigger and bigger, so I decided that, you know, doing that management job which I had enjoyed for quite some time both as a head of department and as a Dean just got out of control, really, so I chose to quit [laughs]' (interviewee 42).

For another interviewee, a spell as Head of Department brought home the extent of 'the marketisation of the university, at the cost of the staff', and it influenced the decision to retire early, 'to put quality of life above jobs' (interviewee 40). Another reported reassessing his former expectation of working on into his seventies as a result of his 'time operating

within the senior management'. This led him to leave employment in his later fifties because of feeling 'increasingly wearied by something, the prevailing culture within the institution' and thinking that 'it was probably best for me to make that kind of break at that time'. Subsequent to this, an emeritus position combined with freedom from his previous 'fairly onerous managerial and leadership responsibilities' gave him 'a new lease of life' (interviewee 16) in terms of academic productivity and, the full interview revealed, more generally.

It is worth noting that many of these interviewees who had become disillusioned with their academic posts mentioned during the course of their interviews that their decisions about the right time for them to retire included having financial security. Mention was made of having paid off the mortgage and having a good pension by interviewee 39, and interviewee 42 referred to 'good occupational pensions and enough money to live well'. The calculation was made by interviewee 40 about their pension along with their other household income that 'we can just about live if everything went wrong and we only had that. So that was enough to say "right!"' and to leave university employment, and interviewee 16 felt that his severance package 'wasn't overly generous but it was enough to make it worth my while'. An interviewee who was still working suggested that their outlook was moving in a similar direction: 'We paid off our mortgage last year and again that's also fed into my thinking, things suddenly become more possible and less constrained' (interviewee 12). This dovetails with the finding that among retired survey respondents the majority (90 [59%]) identified 'being in a position to retire on a reasonable level of income' as a reason for retiring when they did. (Indeed, 102 (64%) said that it was never the case that shortage of money stopped them from doing the things that they wanted to do while only 6 (4%) said this happened often.) Having a reasonable level of income was the single most important factor influencing the timing of retirement, being identified by considerably more respondents than the next on the list, wanting to pursue other life goals, which 60 (39%) agreed with. Next came reaching the state retirement age (39 [26%]), and being offered a favourable financial settlement (36 [24%]), which was the same proportion as indicated dissatisfaction with the university's management and culture (which has been discussed already along with pressure to retire from the university or from family, illness, and stress or burnout). The remaining factors, which were wanting to 'make way' for the next generation of academics (35 [23%]), wanting more time for academic writing and research (20 [13%]), and running out of new ideas (9 [6%]), convey the complexity of the decision about the timing of retirement, adding nuance to the primary (if unremarkable) finding that leaving paid academic work cannot be contemplated seriously until it is considered financially viable to do so.

Several comments by retired survey respondents pointed to the desirability of ending a career on what one called 'a high note' rather than becoming 'a boring old pain who hangs around the Department and becomes an embarrassment' (SWIFE#31). The gist of the message was that it is prudent not to put off retirement indefinitely; one wrote 'I've always been of the view that the time to retire is when people would say "Gosh, is he retiring?" rather than "Thank goodness the old so-and-so is finally going!"', and the other commented that "Best to go when people still want you to stay, rather than waiting till people are desperate for you to go". These sentiments chime with what was said in several interviews

about not wishing to be the person in a department that workmates are keen to see depart. Regarding cases of people who colleagues thought should have retired, mention was made of

> 'where an academic has stayed on too long, by which I mean that they have failed to keep up with the changing university environment. Examples include those who have resisted the push towards emphasising education as much (if not more) than research, and those who find it difficult to adjust to the idea of students as consumers' (interviewee 25).

One interviewee described a colleague who continued to come into work regularly subsequent to formal retirement in their seventies but was perceived to be 'just hanging on and being a bit of a nuisance actually, a bit of an impediment' (interviewee 12). Another interviewee saw the danger of becoming such a person: 'I don't want to cut myself off altogether, but I don't want to be one of these people that hangs around forever, you know. Annoying colleagues and getting in their way' (interviewee 17), while another spoke more generally of 'the people who hang around for quite a long time after they've retired' who may be insufficiently aware of how things continue to move on, with the result that 'people feel a little bit like "well what are they still doing hanging around?' (interviewee 6). This interviewee's sentiments were echoed by the retired survey respondent who had feared in her seventies being 'regarded as "past it" or "out of touch"', and the one who had 'wanted a clean break and did not want a "lingering" role as competence would have declined without "keeping up-to-date"'.

A further interviewee also wished to avoid 'lingering', though in her case was considering her future reception in the lecture hall: 'Will the students want to have a 70-year-old woman prancing about in front of them every week, you know, on research methods? Would they not want someone a bit younger, and easy on the eye, or whatever?... So I don't want to linger' (interviewee 9). Student ageism could also be feared by men, as in the story related of a colleague who

> 'left, I think, at 65. And I said to him, [name redacted], why are you going? He said, financially I don't need to work, but the thing I really dread is becoming the person that students refer to as that old geezer who is always hanging about the place [laughter]. I think he's right and I certainly feel that now, looking back. There comes a point where you need to move aside' (Interviewee 39).

More than one interviewee mentioned finding it difficult to keep up-to-date with how teaching continues to be transformed by technological developments. One who worked for a university that had an established record of distance learning commented 'It's extremely zippy… and keeping up with that is not straightforward for me' (interviewee 41). Another reported feeling 'pushed out by new technology. The pandemic has hastened what was already a strong drift into hi-tech methods of teaching' (interviewee 54), and a third echoed this, recalling that when he 'began to see that this year was going to have to be pretty much entirely digital teaching, I thought, "Thank you, that's enough for me"' (interviewee 49). Others also mentioned difficulties in the forced adjustments related to COVID-19, and at

least one had been influenced in their thinking about when to retire by this, echoing the findings related to survey respondents reported in the opening paragraph of this section in the report.

It is evident that there are many facets to the question of whether there is a right time for academics to retire. For a good number of participants in this study the timing of their retirement had been decided for them, and although the requirement to retire by a specific age has become less common than it had been prior to the 2011 changes in the law, Employer Justified Retirement Age schemes continue to restrict choice for employees of certain universities. Other reasons for age of leaving university employment being 'forced' onto people at what seemed to them a sub-optimal time included redundancy and time-limited offers of early retirement or voluntary severance. One interviewee spoke of people at his institution being given only two weeks to decide whether to accept the severance packages offered as part of COVID-related restructuring. Pressure to retire can be perceived in more indirect ways, for example through the breakdown of collegial relationships at the departmental level which may be experienced as bullying. But the controversial character of these various cases of study participants having felt directly or indirectly compelled to retire at a different age to that which they would have chosen notwithstanding, they constitute only a minority. It was noted at the start of this section that nearly two-thirds of the retired survey respondents had retired at what they considered the right time for them. It has been noted, too, that financial considerations are prominent in such calculations, and that a secure future income may be treated as a necessary condition of satisfactory retirement. It is evident from the findings discussed so far, however, that what Karl Marx called 'the dull compulsion of economic relations' (1954: 689) does not provide a sufficient explanation of how a person arrives at their sense of the right time to retire. For a more complete account, attention needs also to be paid to a range of other factors that prompt the feeling of time for change. These will be discussed in the next section, framed in terms of the evolution of academic identities.

3.c) How do academic identities evolve?

Daniel Kahneman's book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* develops the argument that people's memories of things like careers are selective and, as a result, not wholly reliable: 'In storytelling mode, an episode is represented by a few critical moments, especially the beginning, the peak and the end' (2011: 407). In the current study, the focus on retirement means that endings have particular salience as a point of reference, for example in interviewees' narratives of their careers, survey respondents' assessments of the timing of their retirement, or obituary writers' focus on '"turning-points" in a life' (Fowler 2007: 244) in their overall assessments of their subjects' achievements. Retirement is a time for taking stock of things in the round, in contrast to the more immediate concerns that are to the fore in an ordinary day. The discussion in the previous section of academics described as 'retired scunnered' illustrates nicely the point that how a working life ends may be more prominent in how it is remembered than the years, extending into decades, of routine interactions that preceded it. Interviewee 35, whose final period as an employee we have already heard described as 'a miserable experience', retained several years later a vivid sense of the unhappy ending:

> 'about [year redacted], having experienced lots of departmental and university restructurings, I decided that I would go… I looked at my finances and my wife and I were fairly comfortable financially, partly through parental inheritance and a reasonable pension, I decided I don't really enjoy this very much. I don't mind the reading, writing and dealing with students but I was fed up with the other kind of meetings, the admin. meetings, trying to herd colleagues who were behaving like cats. So I decided… "I'll just get my jotters", as they say up here' (interviewee 35).

By contrast, a retired survey respondent recounted with pleasure how at the end of 'a busy and satisfying career' in which he had grown accustomed to 'an over-crowded diary', he had 'stepped down at the peak of a successful professional life', opining that 'My working life was fascinating but it was right to move on into a very different phase of life and not look back regretfully' (RIFE#29). A similarly sanguine outlook was expressed by the retired interviewee who was comfortable with his accomplishments, and did not dwell on what might have been: 'I'm reasonably content, things worked out quite well, with an element of luck, but it seemed to work out quite well. Inevitably there are things you wished you'd done, there are always projects you wish you'd done but haven't' (interviewee 29). These contrasting cases convey the general point that the way in which working life ends can set very different tones for retirement and thereby influence the nature of the ambitions pursued and quality of life achieved.

The demanding nature of academic careers was referred to by many participants in this project, and the long hours and pressure to deliver on multiple tasks can have the effect of suppress consideration of broader purpose. This was the view of a retired survey respondent who reflected

> 'I think I have adjusted to not being an active player in the academic scene, but this has not always been straightforward since, like many academics, I have invested too

> much self-worth and image in my academic role and "importance". This [retirement] has been a good corrective time, and an important part of growing older and continuing to learn lessons about priorities and which issues are of ultimate significance rather than transitory' (RIFE#33).

Another looked back on a career of having 'worked around the clock' (RIFE#6) and now appreciated having more time to enjoy other activities. One interviewee found that retirement had given her space to take a broader perspective than had been possible during her later working life, because 'in your fifties you've got your head down, you're teaching, you're administering, you're trying to do various things… And it isn't until you retire that you think, "Oh, there's something other than that"' (interviewee 10). Another interviewee recounted a similar evolution in their thinking:

> 'one of the things I've found from retiring is you do ask different questions of yourself which work allows you to defer or hide behind. They are questions about who you are, what your life has been about, and these are things that only occur to you in the long view. You don't see them in your 40s or 50s and the pressure of getting a grant, or this module online, you don't see these things, and some people are uncomfortable with having that stripped away and then you are left with you! What do you really want from life?' (interviewee 39).

As was noted above, compared to the constrained nature of survey responses, the interview format allowed thinking that underpins an opinion to be explored further as part of a dialogue. One particularly perceptive observation made by this interviewee was that 'a lot of people who retire get confronted with this "what on earth am I going to do?"'. This resonated with several accounts provided by interviewees and survey respondents for whom work had been (or in some cases still was) all-encompassing. This interviewee offered such individuals both advice and a warning. The advice was to cultivate non-academic interests, based on recent experience of having, 'perhaps a little to my surprise, … moved a long way away from being an academic….. I've found loads of things to do. I read a lot more than I was allowed to do as an academic, which is ironic'. A range of other activities provided further foci, which were important as defences against the sense of disconnection that were warned against: 'You do feel – and I've spoken to other retired academics about this – really, once you retire you rapidly become invisible. It's like being thrown overboard. The liner carries on crossing the ocean, and you are stuck there, with your lifebelt' (interviewee 39). Concern to avoid such a fate may be a reason why, as another interviewee put it, 'lots of academics… never completely retire' (interviewee 33). For interviewee 39, time away from academic work led to surprise at 'how quickly it all became irrelevant'. At moments like this where analysis of the data suggests that two interviewees would have a fascinating conversation if brought together, the enforced loss of the focus groups from the project is lamented.

The survey respondents would also have been useful contributors to focus group discussions on this issue of marginalization, about which there are markedly different points of view. The analogy of academic careers being like team games is a compelling one (Crow 2020e), and in response to being asked whether they felt '"out of the game", no longer of

consequence', 26 (16%) of the retired survey respondents indicated that they did. This group's members overlapped with the 46 (29%) who reported missing contact with students and the 60 (38%) who missed the social and academic contacts that they had had prior to retirement – what interviewee 22 referred to aptly as 'the stimulus of other people'. It is important to repeat here that in this project retirement is defined as the point at which pensions become the main source of income, not the point at which all academic work ceases. Only 47 (29%) of retired survey respondents were no longer pursuing academic work; as a group they were outnumbered by the 73 (45%) who had undertaken teaching for universities in the preceding twelve months (mainly unpaid) and the 122 (76%)[1] who had undertaken research work in association with their universities in the same period (again mainly unpaid), as reported above in section 3.a). These figures are consistent with other expressions of a 'never retire'/'clean break' spectrum of outlooks. Feeling welcome in their old department/university was reported by 85 (53%) of retired survey respondents, 23 (14%) reported receiving mixed messages, 16 (10%) did not feel welcome but would have liked contact with their former colleagues, and 37 (23%) did not want such contacts. Moreover, 135 (84%) reported being satisfied with the extent of their involvement in academic-related activities, but 12 (8%) would prefer to do more, a further 11 (7%) would do more if paid, and 3 (2%) would prefer to do less. One expression of dissatisfaction was 'I don't think that my old department recognises the potential contribution that I could [make]', another respondent felt insufficiently acknowledged; others referred to inadequate resource provision and to EJRA. These findings are relevant to discussion of the extent of change since Tizard and Owen's (2001) study which identified ways in which post-retirement relationships could be better managed by universities (to be picked up below).

One of the interviewees with long service who was still employed was mindful of the potential for retired people to be confronted by a void where work had been. Recognition that 'one of the issues about retirement is, of course, what do you do with yourself?' was followed by an appreciation of being lucky to have an interesting and enjoyable job, noting in particular 'I like the structure of the day, I like the sociability'; hobbies were not regarded as providing an adequate substitute for these[2], and the further argument was advanced that 'actually retiring is not especially good for your health'. In addition, concern was expressed about 'not somehow any longer being particularly useful; I want to feel useful', and this motivation was linked to 'a very strong public service ethos' rooted in a religious upbringing. It had been reinforced by conversations with 'quite a few people' which conveyed 'a slight note of envy that I'm still working'. In a follow-up email, the interviewee mused tentatively on the question of 'whether the reluctance to retire/staying on as long as possible is sometimes linked to a denial of ageing – of not wanting to have to define yourself as elderly' (interviewee 44). This accords with the more general finding that people's sense of self often does not tally with their chronological age (Thompson *et al.* 1991).

[1] The apparent discrepancy of 29% and 76% summing to 105% may be explained by 8 of the 122 having been engaged in research work in the last year but no longer doing so at the point when the survey was completed.
[2] This view brings to mind Richard Hoggart's remark, made in his later eighties in what turned out to be the last of several books written in retirement, that he was 'neither a Joiner of Societies nor a Hobbies man…. I feel that I must write' (2005: 117).

Contrasts to interviewee 44's situation were provided by a contemporary who had retired and for whom 'my identity has never been all about work' (interviewee 4), and by the younger interviewee who was still working full-time but who did not regard being an academic as

> 'an all-consuming passion… Whilst I've always absolutely loved my job, I've never sought… the same relationship to it that I would feel that, if it wasn't there, life would somehow come crashing down on me. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'll go part-time and regret it hugely [laughs]. But I don't feel that same passion about it that I know some people do. For me, I love it, but it's my job, it's not my whole identity' (interviewee 12).

Another interviewee, who had retired and was definite about her identification as retired, also spoke about academia as a job that she had 'loved', but had left it behind while she was still 'fit enough to still explore other things and… give myself new challenges, do completely different things'. She had arrived at this decision only after extensive reflection:

> 'it's a difficult decision to say that it's time to give up and move on… I have worked with people who just never seem to get to the stage where they think "my job is done, and I can move on and something else"…. There's a bit of confidence [required] because you are losing your identity and it took me a long time to come to terms with that and be comfortable with that…. Certainly many academics that I have worked with their identity is really tied up with the work they do, and giving that up without having plans to do something else is quite challenging, I think.' (interviewee 30).

This view was echoed by the participant who referred to several colleagues for whom being an academic was 'all-absorbing' (interviewee 13) and by the interviewee who believed that 'for academics your job is your identity' and who reported still missing aspects of the work more than a decade on from the date on which she had formally retired, even though during that time she had increasingly 'realised there was more to life than academia' (interviewee 10) and had developed numerous other very rewarding activities.

In the previous section, interviewee 10 was quoted as saying that some aspects of academic life had lost their 'pull' following the death of her husband, and this imagery of forces pulling people towards the occupational communities of which they are part has been used to reveal much about other contexts (Crow 2002: ch.4). Such centripetal forces operate alongside centrifugal forces which, conversely, push individuals towards the margins of the group (or perhaps pull them towards competitors for their time and attention such as family and friends), and the idea of competing centripetal and centrifugal forces offers a helpful perspective on academic career trajectories. Of all the forces exerting a continuing pull to academic life that have been mentioned by participants, the maintenance of the sense of purpose that anchors one's identity as an academic constitutes one of the strongest (and may well be *the* strongest). An interviewee nearly a decade on from formal retirement was still very active in what they regarded not as 'a job of work' but as 'a calling, it is a vocation… We are very fortunate to get paid for what we do and indeed post-retirement to continue to

be able to do it, on a reasonable pension' (interviewee 3). The echoes here of Max Weber's (1970) notion of science as a vocation were deliberate, even if this interviewee did not trace their own sense of a vocation back to a religious upbringing in the way that interviewee 44 had. A retired survey respondent was of a similar view, stating that 'being an academic scientist is not, or should not be, "just" a job…. rather it is who one is - part of one's constitution. As such, one does not, and cannot stop being a scientist' (RIFE#60). Seven years on from the decision to retire so that more time could be freed up for academic writing and research, this individual continued to be engaged in scientific endeavours for more than half of each working week, unpaid.

Academic positions can affirm a positive identity, and the prospect of losing this may be felt keenly. Interviewee 20, who is still working, expressed a fear about retirement: 'When you're an academic you just never stop thinking…. It sort of scares me a little bit not having a structure to the day…. I think I'll probably still read and write a lot, even when I'm retired'. Another interviewee for whom retirement was 'somewhere on the horizon' was mindful of how, for academics,

> 'sometimes there is a lure of staying on, because we are on the whole taken seriously in our jobs. So you don't want to exchange that when you retire with a pat on the back or a squeeze of the hand by well-meaning younger people, or people still in work for that matter'.

Informing this analysis was an awareness of how gender could play a part in this process, with the suggestion that women are more vulnerable than men to being infantilised:

> 'As a woman I've spent an awful lot of decades trying to be taken seriously in some ways. Being seen as an adult and as someone who may have some valuable things to say. Now that I think I've achieved that, you know, most people seem to find me reasonably interesting. I don't want to end up as an older woman to be dismissed or ignored and I think work in some ways gives you that protection from social and cultural ageing' (interviewee 9).

A male interviewee mentioned an academic he knew who had retired but continued to teach a module every year, unpaid, commenting 'that clearly is important to him because he feels he's still part of something'. Regarding another male academic who was still working well beyond 70, he remarked 'I think he has a dread of not working. His self, his self-definition, identity is very much bound up with being able to and being wanted for work, more or less full-time' (interviewee 5). One female interviewee even offered the opinion that 'men don't know how to stop, to generalise hugely' (interviewee 31), and the relative susceptibility of women and men to centripetal forces reinforcing their identity as academics is certainly a question warranting further analysis. A former Dean had plenty of experience on which to base her observation that it can be 'both women and men…. who say "I don't know what I'd do if I couldn't carry on working"' (interviewee 42). It was a male participant who anticipated (albeit tongue-in-cheek) 'They'll retire me when they nail my coffin down' (interviewee 34), but the participant who said 'my life has become so that work is such a part of it that I can't see that I can just turn off a tap' (interviewee 38) was female,

as was interviewee 15 who commented, 'I can't see myself ever stopping working as I get so much pleasure and fulfilment from it and it also satisfies my need to feel useful/helpful to others'.

These and other interviewees emphasised that the attraction for them was engagement with the world of ideas, not the institutional structures of the universities that employed them. Indeed, these two things were to some extent in tension for interviewee 38, who was 'not that committed to the neo-liberal university' because of the way it had developed an oppressive 'managerialist style' and its imposition of unnecessary administrative burdens, and for interviewee 34 who distinguished between the 'vocational aspects' of being a scholar (which he valued) and the 'institutional manifestations' of contemporary higher education such as Research Excellence Framework exercises (which he did not). Interviewee 48 singled out the 'torrent of emails' that contemporary universities generated as his particular bête noire, at the same time noting that he has ambitions to write further academic books, adding 'There is plenty to do without the day job'. That this tension is not particularly new is indicated by the obituary of the English literature scholar Catherine Belsey which quoted her description of how she had been, in her early 60s,

> 'driven out of full-time academic life in 2003 by the mounting bureaucracy that required me to choose between writing books and compiling reports on the books I had already written, might write, would write if only a space could be made among all the monitoring, planning and applications for funding' (in Badmington and Thomas 2021).

Interviewee 34 was prompted by such episodes to warn of the dangers of 'nostalgia', recognising that 'things weren't always so great in the old days, they were pretty awful in the old days too, as well as having different kinds of pressures than the ones we have now'. The more general point that the bureaucratic way in which universities operate may be understood as a centrifugal force for academics (expressed by interviewee 2 as 'changes within universities push anyone with a full life to lead to take up new activities'), running counter to the centripetal force of working creatively with ideas, provided a rich seam in the interviews and surveys. One survey respondent lamented that 'spurious management indicators have displaced academic values', but having retired at 65 was still devoting the equivalent of half a working week to academic activity. A similar position was occupied by the interviewee who was the best part of a decade on from formally retiring but still committed 'to get on with my work' which he did for four or five hours each day, enjoying the freedom from 'the administrative obligations and… the various bureaucratic meetings that I attended when I was fully in post' (interviewee 18). A survey respondent still working echoed this sentiment through the observation that 'Current management is having a negative impact on the attractiveness of the university', and dissatisfaction with aspects of the management and culture of the institution was identified as one factor that was influencing their decision about when to retire. An interviewee who had engaged in consultancy for a number of years after leaving university employment was prompted by the experience to 'pity all the poor people who work in institutions' (interviewee 43), having

to deal with what another interviewee referred to pejoratively as 'key performance indicators and all of this stuff' (interviewee 4).

The fact that continued pursuit of scholarly activity did not necessarily indicate identification with the way in which their universities were run may help to explain the finding that 50 (31%) of the retired survey participants reported working in the past year for the equivalent of 50% full-time or more on research, in the main unpaid. Alongside the finding reported in 3.a) above that 47% of retired survey participants had continued with paid work after formal retirement, this confirms that academic endeavour by the individual does not have to stop when their contract ends, and may even be stimulated at that point, as it had been for the interviewee who said 'I love being out of the university, because it was driving me nuts' (interviewee 3). We have seen that some people are compelled by EJRAs to leave employment before they feel ready to leave their academic work behind, and that others not constrained by EJRAs can and do continue to be employed well beyond state retirement age. Opinions on this were sharply divided, as they are in the wider academic community (Grove 2018). The discussion in 3.b) showed that 35 (23%) of the retired survey respondents included wanting to make way for the next generation of academics among their reasons for retiring (men were more likely than women to agree with this), and among the participants in the survey of working academics 31 (39%) agreed that the move away from a mandatory retirement age was negative because it blocks opportunities for the next generation (with women being slightly more likely than men to indicate agreement with this view). Several interviewees echoed this point of view, including the one who had become

> 'extremely irritated by colleagues who wanted to take advantage of the abolition of a final retirement age and were just planning on staying on till they were 70 plus. I thought this was incredibly unfair on all our many younger colleagues and PhD students who couldn't get a job anywhere. And I thought, if you can afford to go whilst still continuing to do the work you want to do, then why not!' (interviewee 24).

Interviewee 34 was another to express such sentiments, observing 'the question of can you consider working forever is a really urgent one because the longer we stay in the job, you're occupying that position for that time too, which means others can't'. Similarly, interviewee 48 considered retirement as providing the opportunity to 'keep on doing the things I want to do to some extent, not do the things I don't want to do, have a slightly less pressured life and free up some money for a younger person to have a job'. An interviewee who had continued to work full-time acknowledged the force of this argument but presented it as part of a 'difficult balance' involving 'the wish to carry on doing something with the need for new people coming in'. His personal experience was summed up as 'I still enjoy working, I still get on well with students, still getting good ratings, still getting external funding in and travelling', and other parts of the interview conveyed that these centripetal forces were reinforced by on-going working relationships with a team that had been built up over many years, leading to the overall assessment that 'I don't think I have let anyone down by staying on' (interviewee 20). The further observation was made that, by working on into one's 70s, certain new, long-term, non-academic activities that are open to people retiring by their

mid-60s come to be less viable as options with the passage of time, and this narrowing range of alternatives can operate as a further 'pull' to stay in the job. Interviewee 53 saw the issue of compulsory retirement ages as part of a broader dilemma. He considered moving away from a fixed retirement age 'very sensible…. why get rid of someone who is really valuable and does a great job and the students still like them, why should they be forced to retire?' At the same time the policy change could create the need for 'dealing with people who stay on but are incompetent', which he thought universities did not handle well.

In contrast to interviewee 20's situation of continuing to be very engaged with teaching, a sense of increasing distance from students influenced one interviewee, who commented that 'you can go on, it's my impression, pretty much for as long as you want to, as long as you've still got people to work with and something to say', but who recalled 'in my early sixties, I found the 18 year olds talked about different things…. I think people probably go on until they feel they are no longer in touch with 18 year olds, the age gap is too great, or they… no longer feel that they're making a contribution' (interviewee 29). Colleagues may be aware of the arrival of this point sooner than the individuals in question: 'There comes a stage where you think there is too big a gap… I've worked with people who I've thought, they should have gone years ago' (interviewee 30). For another interviewee the centrifugal force involved not so much students as younger colleagues who were taking their research field in an unwelcome direction:

> 'I had a slight feeling that the work that was being done, I was less convinced, I was less excited by it, you know, the sort of theories that were coming along… There wasn't much behind the things being produced, so I was left with a feeling of distance from the work that was being done and a feeling that perhaps I represented previous generations of work and I was less in the mainstream anymore… Other people I know felt the same' (interviewee 52).

This ties in with the findings reported above about some retired survey participants coming to feel 'out of the game' and 'no longer of consequence', and with the sentiments expressed by Silver's interviewee Duncan who lamented 'the sense of no longer being needed' and the related feeling that 'my opinion is not as important as it was' (2018: 138). Silver's analysis of her data in terms of processes of disengagement working counter to the reproduction of continuity has similarities to the idea of centrifugal and centripetal forces being used here. It is possible, of course, that an individual may experience both centrifugal and centripetal forces, as is suggested by the observation that 'For many, though not all, the life of an emeritus faculty member is a confused and conflicted time' (Elangovan and Hoffman 2021: 71) as he or she looks to make retrospective sense of their career and its purpose.

The data being reported here suggest that Elangovan and Hoffman are right to argue not only that the period following retirement may be a 'confused and conflicted time' for academics but also that it is the predictable outcome of academic life at all stages being dogged by 'questions, doubts and perils' (2021: 68). The data from the current study's survey participants and interviewees convey that the questions on which attention has been focussed so far (What does 'retirement' mean? Is there a right time to retire? And How do academic identities evolve?) may lie dormant at earlier, career-building stages, but come

increasingly to the fore as later career stages are entered and retirement becomes more realistic to consider both financially and in terms of the changing balance of past and future academic achievements and recognition. The identification in Table 2 of the most prominent forces that attract or repel individuals may thus be less recognisable to early-career academics than they are to people at later-career stages; as interviewee 6 observed, 'when you're younger, of course, it's difficult thinking about planning for your retirement because you feel like it's so far away'. Few participants' accounts of their career trajectories specified a point in time when they had started to think about being retired and the practicalities of retirement, but those that did located it when they were in their fifties at the earliest, which is significantly later than the age reported for managers by Richard Scase and Robert Goffee (1989: 100). One said 'I suppose you start thinking about retiring when people around you

Table 2. Centrifugal and centripetal forces in career trajectories

Centripetal forces	Centrifugal forces
Affirmation of the value of one's work	Stress and/or poor health, possibly induced by sense of underperformance in context of audit culture
Social connection with colleagues/students	Diminution/breakdown of collegial relationships/growing sense of age gap with students
Enjoyment from engaging with ideas	Dislike of new academic trends, feeling superseded, and running out of ideas/running out of steam
Sense of purpose (perceived duty to contribute and be useful, possibly hubristic)	Alienation from bureaucratic organization; Employer Justified Retirement Ages; desire to 'make way' for the next generation
Continuing financial recompense	Appeal of 'comfortable' retirement
Absence of alternatives ('what else would I do?')	Retirement as a time to re-set work-life balance and focus on broad wellbeing

retire' (interviewee 9), although becoming disillusioned was another prompt that she noted. In two cases the process was triggered not by reaching a particular age but by a series of rejections of research grant applications and of journal article submissions and the associated feeling that their best work was perhaps now behind them.

One interview question that was asked in the expectation that it might shed light on the evolution of academic trajectories relates to role models and whether interviewees identified with particular individuals as role models. Against expectations, a frequent response was that people did not operate with role models, and in some cases were hostile to the very idea that they might: 'I don't look for them. I don't like role models. Or usually I look at other people and think "That's not what I want". It's very rare for me to think "Oh, I wish I was like that"' (interviewee 9). One regarded the idea as 'trans-Atlantic psychobabble' (interviewee 18), while another felt no need for role models, describing himself as 'largely self-propelling' (interviewee 8). Another reason for caution was that 'Circumstances vary so much that what Is applicable to one person in one generation may have little relevance to another in a following generation' (interviewee 32). A further argument was that role models had not been available to the 'generation of women who have broken ground….

[who have] had to do it our own way' (interviewee 31). The American sociologist Arlie Hochschild is interesting here for her counter-argument to this, that role models may prove particularly useful for women (and others, such as people from minority ethnic backgrounds) who have had to confront treatment by the academy as outsiders. Her concern to explore the possibility of women forging a career in a male-dominated environment led to her showing that there are alternatives to 'the clockwork of male careers' (2003: ch.17) with its pattern of accumulated accomplishments framed in terms of institutionally-endorsed goals that may nevertheless turn out to be personally unfulfilling. There are parallels between graduate students being provided with role models for academic careers and the discussion of whether particular individuals have managed the transition to retirement in ways that might usefully inform mid- and later-career academics.

Among those interviewees who entertained the possibility that role models may serve a useful purpose for academics approaching retirement, it was not always necessary to identify particular individuals, simply the trajectory that they had followed and the qualities that they embodied. Thus interviewee 12 said 'I admire those who have been quite decisive about it. So I suppose the people I admire are the people who have made a clean break…. those who are sort of like, "Okay, I've done what I want to do there and that's it"'. Interviewee 6 was similarly influenced by people who represented the ethos that 'there is life after academia'. Towards the other end of the never retire/clean break spectrum there was some admiration for people who devote their retirement to continued academic activity, because they 'give people an idea of what academic life might be like if you didn't have to spend a lot of time in administration and doing unnecessary bureaucratic chores, filling out forms on how long you spend on academic work', people who 'give you an idea of what it is to be a true historian' (interviewee 1). In this vein more than one interviewee mentioned the sociologist Bauman's celebrated achievements in publishing and public engagement which were mentioned in the Introduction. During the two and a half decades following his retirement aged 65 he produced more than a book a year and regularly undertook international speaking engagements. Prior to his retirement, administrative responsibilities were responsible for leaving him with, he said, 'no time for thinking or writing' (Wagner 2020: 326). Between these two ends of the spectrum were several interviewees who used the word 'balance', including the interviewee who pointed to his former supervisor as a role model: 'He just carried on working, but he always had a very good work-life balance… It's unhealthy to work until you drop or absolutely stop doing everything then have nothing to do in your life' (interviewee 51). For interviewee 42, envy of people who 'are amazing in that it seems like they never retired' was quickly tempered by the recognition that 'I don't want to be working the whole time…. [If] you are in your mid-seventies you don't need to flog yourself like this anymore'. Balance was also a theme for interviewee 21, whose former colleague was admired for having 'carried on learning… alongside [tending] his allotment. They satisfy different parts of his personality'.

In the relatively few instances where interviewees named specific individuals as role models, they were used to illustrate particular qualities. Thus Barbara Tizard was pointed to as a model of someone 'active, engaged with life, doing different things' (interviewee 38). Stuart Hall was mentioned as an example of 'people who have managed to keep going in their

fields way beyond the time of their institutional structure', in his case returning to long-standing personal interests

> 'which were very much to do with art and literature. He went off and became a Professor of Sociology and well-known political theorist, Marxist, all very serious stuff, but he did love art and literature and he found a way to spend the last 20 years of his life mainly doing that, which he hadn't had time to do before. And I thought that was a tremendously admirable thing to do' (interviewee 49).

Another role model identified was David Morgan, whose recent obituary (Scott 2020) following his death aged 82 prompted his identification by an interviewee as someone leaving behind enduring achievements; he was remembered as

> 'in many ways an exemplary academic because he's gone on, contributing to everything from debates to writing. And he's always been a very sweet presence in my experience and it's good that that's remembered in the obituary. I've done several obituaries for academics in the last 5 or 6 years, and for others, and it's a sense of loss. It's obviously a sense of a career that's been achieved, and I think that's very much the case for David, because very sadly he's gone and obviously leaves people behind, but never mind in a way because he's not only a loving person but he's an achiever, he's an intellectual achiever, and I think that's what I'd like said about me, I'd achieved certain things, and it makes it all worthwhile.'
>
> Interviewer: 'And maybe it's having achieved things without trampling on other people?'
>
> 'I think that's very important, because I don't feel David ever trampled on anyone.' (interviewee 24).

Such individuals were lauded by this interviewee for their 'commitment to a vocation' and their 'sense of purpose', and for their 'aspiration to achieve something' which could continue to be appreciated both during their retirement and after their death. It is unsurprising to find David Morgan remembered in this way in a book about pioneers of social research, along with his partner, Janet Finch (Thompson *et al*. 2021: 174-7).

There are, it is important to note, risks associated with thinking in terms of role models, not least because people's good points can, from another vantage point, be bad points. One risk is the danger of hagiography; even academics explicitly fêted as saintly may need to have that attributed status corrected. In the case of her father, Richard Titmuss, Ann Oakley casts doubt on the idea that he was a saint and on the diametrically-opposite notion advanced by one of his critics that he was 'a snake in saint's clothing' (Oakley 2014: 244). Stephen Turner's key criterion for a good role model is someone who is 'kindly', open, and able to keep 'their intellectual balance' (2005: 304). A second risk is that accounts of role models may exaggerate their agency, and play down the extent to which their successful careers contained within them elements of chance or serendipity; even apparently seamless progression may have within it elements of the older sense of the word 'career' which is derogatory through its implication of being uncontrolled (Williams 1983: 52-3). Richard

Sennett has argued that the spread of 'flexible capitalism' has revived this anxiety-inducing sense of career by making it difficult to know 'what paths to pursue' (1998: 9). Thirdly, by focussing on an individual's achievements and attributes, context is overlooked; the institutional context within which they worked and the supportive network of colleagues and associates which were part of the creative process are also due acknowledgement (Crow 2020e). The stories of the women whose negotiation of obstacle-strewn career paths provide 'doughty role models' (David and Woodward 1998: 18) emphasise this point. For all of these reasons we should heed Bridget Fowler's warnings, based on her analysis of obituaries, about what she has called 'cherished conceptions of the ideal career' (2015: 125). The development of academic identities constitutes an important element in career trajectories and the process of retirement, but universities and other organizations also play their part in determining outcomes. The fourth set of findings is devoted to reporting on how individual journeys are made in the context of institutional influences and practices.

3.d) What support do universities provide?

One of the more surprising findings of this research was the indication of the scale of change since the days when, in one interviewee's institution at least, 'Emeritus Professors were given an office and a secretary' (interviewee 27). This was reported to be the case as recently as the 1980's but (as was noted above) fewer than a third of working survey participants envisaged being given access to a shared office, and the possibility of secretarial support did not even feature among the questions put to survey participants. Among retired survey participants, 55 (38%) had access to a shared office and 12 (8%) access to laboratory space and facilities, 93 (65%) access to information technology support, 128 (89%) access to a university email account, and 135 (94%) access to a university library. Just over one fifth (34 [22%]) identified at least one facility or resource that they would like to have that has not been made available to them, and office space, IT support, email accounts and library access were among the things mentioned, indicating that there is no automatic entitlement, even for things that are relatively low cost for institutions to provide. Among working survey participants, expectations that these resources would be offered to them upon retirement were consistently *lower* than the numbers of retired survey participants who reported receiving them. This was also true for financial support to attend conferences, which 10% of retired survey participants reported being able to apply for but only 6% of working survey participants expected to have available to them after their retirement. One of the motivations for the current research project was Tizard and Owen's finding, based on a survey conducted in the 1990's, that 'concerns were expressed about the failure of universities to give adequate status and resources to retired academics' (2001: 253). In a subsequent paper, Tizard noted the 'wide variation in the extent of support offered' by universities, reflecting amongst other things different rationales being employed about whether the support was 'seen as a privilege, or as a cost-effective way of contributing to the work and reputation of the university' (2004: 257). Because this study's methodology and sampling frame differ in important respects from those of Tizard and Owen's studies, direct comparisons cannot be made, but the re-use in the current study of many of their survey questions does allow some observations about change over time (albeit recognising that national arrangements have not stood still in the interim, notably in relation to fixed retirement ages and pensions arrangements).

In the previous section the idea of centrifugal and centripetal forces was introduced as a way of thinking about later career trajectories and how academic identities evolve. Two ends of the spectrum of possible outcomes were described by the interviewee who told the story of a colleague who had retired but 'hadn't thought about it at all and hadn't imagined it, and just felt as if a limb had been cut off' (interviewee 22), and the happier story provided by the retired interviewee who considered his ongoing fractional contract

> 'a way of giving me a firm leg into the university which provides, for me, resources and access that I value and I require for the things I like forming and want to do. So as far as I'm concerned it is a marriage made in heaven. I don't have any complaints whatsoever' (interviewee 46).

These were not isolated examples. Interviewee 40 recalled a conversation with a distinguished colleague who, after retiring, had bemoaned the failure of their institution to smooth the transition, saying 'I feel as if I do not count for anything anymore'. By contrast, interviewee 1 described her honorary staff affiliation as 'ideal' because it 'allows me to do various useful things…. There are certain things I don't want to do, I'm very happy not to do administration, I love not having to mark essays, and I really love the time being able to do more reading and writing'. More concisely, interviewee 42 described the support received as 'terrible', while interviewee 19 spoke of his experience as 'excellent'. These interviewees were all at different universities, confirming the continuing relevance of Tizard's observation about wide institutional variation in the levels of support provided. Interviewee 53's distinction between those institutions that 'treat and think of members of staff as a cohesive group' and 'operate as collectives', and the ones that 'operate as collections of individuals' is relevant here, especially if the assessment is correct that the latter are less collegial and 'might just want to see the back of you'.

A common theme of dissatisfaction related to the way in which the end of people's time as employees was handled by universities. Interviewee 21 thought 'they could make a bit more of a fuss of their retiring people…. most people get the feeling that they'd prefer them to disappear', which was consistent with interviewee 40's ironic recollection of receiving 'a nice email saying we hear that you're going, don't forget to return anything you have borrowed. Then a nice email from a technician saying you have a camera. Don't forget if you have any equipment, and return your [office] key. And that's your farewell letter. Cheers! [laughs]'. Interviewee 11 had been given a send-off by her immediate colleagues but was hurt not to receive acknowledgement of her contribution from the central university: 'I'd been there…. for more or less forty years and I was quite offended not to even get a letter of thanks or anything that even suggested that the institution had even noticed me being around a long time [laughs]…. I just thought that was a bit poor'. Another dimension of the process of retirement that is laden with symbolic meaning relates to how people are treated on their last day at work. Interviewee 30, who had been an Assistant Dean, recalled how she had 'chaired a validation of a degree the day I left…. I worked up till the last minute, worked up till 4 p.m. on a Friday afternoon, then I left…. looking back on it, that was a really harsh way to go'. Colleagues' main concern seemed to be a functional one: 'Let's get the validations done before she goes!'.

Further description of the events surrounding interviewee 30's retirement revealed it to be the archetypal 'cliff edge' ending, as discussed in section 3.a). On telling her line manager of her intention to retire, he had 'said he would be really sorry for me to go and that was it. So there was no "let's wind down", or "let's see what else you could be doing", it was just five, six months' notice…. There was nothing at all'. There was no exploration of the possibility of a transitional period of working part-time, although with hindsight this was regarded as something that would have been helpful: 'It was never offered, and I didn't raise it either. But I do think there needs to be a bit more preparation going from working full-time…. to absolutely nothing'. Interviewee 30 also recounted that the departure of colleagues who had left as part of voluntary severance schemes could be even more compressed, encapsulated in the message 'your application's approved and you're leaving today', which

she described as 'brutal'. Interviewee 42 described similar experiences of retiring from her university: 'There wasn't really any help with the transition. I think on the whole institutions are quite happy for you to go really, they would rather you just went [laughs]', although in her case she had at least been given 'a nice farewell party'. Interviewee 9 expressed a similar view, based on her experience of seeing an older colleague struggle under mounting pressure of work: 'I think institutions are really poor at helping people make that transition, or being sensitive to the individual's needs as they get older…. We're just leaving it to individuals to just throw in the towel, as it were'. On the basis of having 'witnessed several occasions where staff working up to, and sometimes beyond, retirement [age] are reluctant to take the plunge for fear of financial difficulties and loss of identity', interviewee 25 expressed the opinion that 'Institutions could certainly do more to support those who need it'. Implicit in this perspective is that academics at later stages of their careers may also have some responsibility for being proactive, and entering into a dialogue with their universities.

The earlier discussion of retirement being a taboo subject for some people was echoed in interviewee 14's remark that the issue is in the territory of 'conversations people do not like to have'. In particular, people's concerns about their standard of living once their pension is their main source of income are a matter that may be difficult to broach. Alongside this is the status and recognition that people retiring would like to be accorded, connected as that is to their sense of self. Interviewee 14's observation that there is variation in the extent to which people are 'amenable to the conversation' is borne out in several interviewees' accounts. Interviewee 25 reported being

> 'amazed by the number of colleagues who are unhappy at work but keep working because they are afraid that their pension will be insufficient for their needs. Mostly this seems to be because they don't fully understand how the pension works, or how much money they will need to finance their lifestyle post retirement'.

This was echoed by the comment from interviewee 28 about financial planning, 'I think more people could leave if they knew more about it. I didn't really begin to understand my pension until I was about 60'. By comparison, interviewee 17 was full of praise for her institution's provision which sought to promote discussion: 'The HR [Human Resources] Director is excellent, absolutely excellent. So they do have these preparing for retirement seminars, they have pension and tax meetings, they encourage the phased retirement, they are very positive about that.' With regard to recognition, interviewee 15 argued that, 'one of the most significant things is about appreciation and being appreciated'. Failure to appreciate and make use of the 'wisdom and experience' available from retired colleagues was regrettable for two reasons: 'a) that's a loss, and b) you do feel, I mean it doesn't matter because I've got plenty to do, but it does feel slightly insulting when you've put an awful lot into a department and then basically it's, well, "bye"', followed by contact falling away. Interviewee 15's story has parallels with that of an academic participant in Lawrence-Lightfoot's study who was driven by lack of appreciation and 'the pain of being discarded' to exclaim, uncharacteristically, 'I will get those fuckers…. I am now the road-rage person!' (2009: 32). Interviewee 26 presented a more favourable account of his institution in this respect because it provides

> ‘a series of transition workshops which is run by HR, so they talk to you about that transition to retirement…. There is a recognition that academics tend not to retire fully, so there is the emeritus route that you can apply for…. But still emphasis on making a contribution, it’s not just an honorary title, there are still expectations you will do things for the institution’.

A mixed picture was painted by interviewee 31 who reported that her university’s central administration had been helpful in encouraging her to look ahead to her retirement in terms of financial planning, but her department’s failure to recognise ‘what I had to offer’ post-retirement left her feeling ‘slightly bitter’. For interviewee 29, the allocation of praise and criticism was the reverse, because he did get recognition from his department including requests to teach, but the central university’s rules preventing emeritus staff being paid stood as an obstacle to meeting that request; ‘It did ok, it could have done better’ was his overall assessment.

In several descriptions of retired staff who had an on-going relationship with their institutions the benefits to the latter were seen as unambiguously outweighing the minimal costs. A person still active in research began her description of her arrangement with a question:

> ‘Why would they want to get rid of me? I don’t make any demands of them. I use the library and I’m occasionally useful, I’m not taking up space, I’m not taking up people’s time, I have an occasional meeting once or twice a year with my line manager, but I’m not making demands so why would they get rid of me, I’m not making a problem and I may occasionally be useful’ (interviewee 36).

Another remarked ‘I’d have thought there were advantages for the University to keep research active staff on in some capacity…. my experience has been fairly positive’ (interviewee 33), while an interviewee who was still working referred to several retired colleagues ‘who’ve got research grants, senior mentoring roles for staff and students, that’s clearly to the benefit of institutions’ (interviewee 27). A less sanguine perspective was offered by the interviewee who likened working at a university to ‘swimming with crocodiles’; she felt her institution’s message to staff applying for emeritus status was

> ‘you can keep that position as long as you’re doing things for us! That we can say is worth our while, if we’ll benefit from something you’ll do that’s high profile, or you’ll do some unpaid PhD supervision, you know, something. It’s much less about what people could do or would like to do, at the end of careers, whatever the level, not just professorial, maybe after working hard for forty years or thirty years or whatever, and devoting time to a particular institution, or to the sector. It might be good to support what are people’s dreams around creative academic work’ (interviewee 38).

She was not the only interviewee to convey the idea of employees’ loyal service being deserving of greater recognition, whether in terms of access to resources or of pensions settlement. Finances were the focus for the interviewee who recounted discussions with the university accountant prior to his departure: ‘I said look, I’ve given this institution…. more

than thirty years of my life and I've worked very hard for it, and I think you should be generous with me' (interviewee 32), much to the university official's surprise.

One interviewee advanced a theory to explain why universities may not strain every sinew to maintain a connection with retired staff. This was framed in terms of how much universities have changed in recent years:

> 'A lot of universities don't want old people around as they're going to be grumblers. And it's best to get rid of them…. You don't want them around as they'd sit with new people all depressed about their heavy work-load. And either you'd give them good stories, "well, in my day we didn't have to do any of this", or you'll be grumbling about how bad things look from your view. So they don't really want you around' (interviewee 19).

Interviewee 2 made a similar point about the temptation 'of being the old-guard critical whinger', but also argued that, however understandable this temptation might be, 'There's still quite a lot to be positive about in academic endeavour and its forms of social relations, so younger colleagues are best helped by not seeing you in that way' (interviewee 2). Another interviewee detected a 'mood in universities that, you know, basically what you don't want to be doing is being bothered by people with experience' (interviewee 18). The discussion in section 3.b) of older colleagues regarded as 'hanging about' and overstaying their welcome in university departments has a bearing on this discussion, as does interviewee 34's comment about the 'generation that's retiring and thinking they are only a repository of wisdom; they can be the repository of very negative and unconstructive things too'. Another interviewee drew attention to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'the biographical illusion' from which they drew the conclusion that careers are wrongly likened to a steady, progressive ascent. The implication of this is that people further on in their careers in chronological terms may mistakenly perceive their position as necessarily being at the summit; Bourdieu's analysis is a warning against 'narcissistic' (2000: 302) tendencies to imagine oneself at the centre of things. Put another way, academics are not immune from the dangers of conceit, even hubris (Stebbins 2017; Crow 2020g), of being overly 'self-important' as one working survey participant put it. A corrective to these dangers was provided over a century ago by Weber's observation that 'We cannot work without hoping that others will advance further than we have' (1970: 138), that scientific achievements quickly become overtaken and that academics must resign themselves to this fact. Later careers and retirement may, in consequence, be characterised by a sense of disappointment to the extent that the enduring quality of achievements is brought into question (Craib 1994).

Ray Pahl's (1995) contribution to the discussion of later career trajectories includes the suggestion that career successes may be followed not by people feeling increasingly secure in their identities but by anxiety and uncertainty. This was brought to mind by interviewee 18's comment that 'you are only as good as your next publication', and by reference to debates about when during academic careers people's best work is done (Becher and Trowler 2001: ch.7). In STEM subjects there is a widely-held belief that people's most significant achievements occur early on in careers, and an interviewee from one of these

disciplines reiterated this position, that 'all the sort of real heroes of the subject have done it all by the time they are 25 or 26'; this prompts consideration of what comes next, and the further question of 'what happens when they retire?' (interviewee 21). Such ideas are contested, of course, and one survey participant in his late sixties still working part-time felt that the positive response he had received to recent publications 'suggests I am still capable of high quality work…. I can still do important, interesting and innovative stuff' (SWIFE#27). There are, in other words, 'late bloomers' as well as 'early achievers' (Kalleberg 2007: 65). Different perspectives are held in STEM and non-STEM disciplines; in the latter the correlation of achievement of a person's best research work with age can be found (such as the case of Bauman considered in the previous section's discussion of role models), albeit only rarely. If we consider the discipline of sociology and examine the of ages of authors when the work considered their most influential was published, the twelve authors selected for inclusion in Gordon Marshall's *In Praise of Sociology* (1990) range in age from their twenties to their late forties. Such exercises do, however, suffer from gender bias, reflecting their concentration predominantly on men (Halsey 2004: ch.9), and also from a focus on research to the neglect of the teaching and administration dimensions of academic careers. It has been noted that 'A substantial section of academics taken as a whole…. change direction during their careers…. towards a management role rather than changing their research specialism' (Becher and Trowler 2001: 143). One retired interviewee had a clear recollection of such a turning point in his career more than two decades previously:

> 'I can remember that specific moment, when I was approached to be Head of a Department in [University name redacted] and I was a Professor, and the Dean said to me, "You're at a crossroads", and he said he'd been at a crossroads many years back, and he said, "You're at a crossroads now and you can't take on more managerial administrative responsibility and continue the kind of a good academic career unless you find a lot of collaborators"…. I can still remember that afternoon in that office and knowing, or believing, yes, I would have to run myself ragged trying to do both. So I chose the admin route which in a sense put me on the treadmill towards vice principal kind of territory. Do I wish I'd done it differently? Maybe' (interviewee 28).

This interviewee was by no means the only one whose career trajectory had taken them away from research and teaching, and those people whose careers follow such trajectories may subsequently find them difficult to reorient.

When asked what advice they would give to more junior colleagues about how to approach an academic career, the theme of balance (which has already been encountered in section 3.c)) was mentioned by one interviewee whose career had been broad-ranging:

> 'It's about keeping things in balance as much as possible…if you can somehow keep them all in balance and don't lose touch with your teaching, don't lose touch with your research, and continue to make your contribution to leadership and management. That gives you options at the end' (interviewee 16).

The potential for tension between more academic and administrative career routes led another interviewee to advise 'keep several strings to your bow' (interviewee 50). A third interviewee, however, one who had not yet retired, suggested that academic careers do not necessarily lend themselves to conscious planning, at least in their earlier stages:

> 'I suppose I always think about how my career has unfolded, it's never been very strategic or deliberately planned, you know, I've just happened to have been in the right place at the right time, and been involved in things that have led from one thing to another, whereas now I am thinking quite strategically and deliberately about the decisions and routes I want to follow, with…. [an] end goal in mind' (interviewee 12).

The theme of serendipity in academic career progression is a common one, as are the related ideas of taken steps being accidental or unplanned (Crow 2020f), or even a 'lottery' as one participant put it, but it is interesting to note the shift in perspective in interviewee 12's account. For those looking to impose a degree of order onto the process there is no shortage of publications for early career academics in the form of mentoring advice on how to establish themselves in their chosen field (see, e.g., Woodthorpe 2018), but less material has been published specifically aimed at those at mid- and later-career stages (Crow 2020a).

We have seen that interviewees have reported varying degrees of satisfaction with the advice and support given to them by their employing institutions, for example in relation to an employee's right to request moving from a full-time to a fractional contract. Part of this variation related to the amount of information made available, but in addition there were varying assessments of how useful such information was. One argued that 'Universities probably need more conscious policy', remembering there having been 'very little indeed about preparation for retirement. In the past there were seminars for academics, on financial advice, but not softer stuff. I think Universities could do more, particularly if they are intent on slicing their staffing budgets' (interviewee 13). Interviewee 2 was supportive of his university's provision relating to 'the psychological aspects of moving out and moving on', and interviewee 23 recommended offering (but not to mandating) 'advice on a range of subjects including finance, social contacts, health and other aspects of satisfactory "later living"'. Others saw things differently: 'I don't really think it's up to institutions to find pleasant retirements for people, they have to do that themselves' (interviewee 1); likewise, interviewee 5 'never sought any institutional help', and interviewee 25 spoke for many by asserting 'Individuals need to empower themselves', what interviewee 40 called 'taking the power into your own hands'. On the particular issue of people's plans to retire, there was acknowledgement that university representatives have to tread carefully. Interviewee 41 noted that line managers conducting appraisals are prevented by age discrimination concerns from asking about retirement plans, having instead

> 'to wait for the person to say "my future looks like this". Now when I started to say that, which was about 5 years ago, I'm going to slow down, then my head of department who was doing the appraisals, said "Look, there is this and this in place", and some of it I used and it really involved getting advice on the slow down process and certainly as soon as I said a couple of months ago that I was going to formally

> retire, I immediately got a note from the Dean saying "Thank you, here are the links you need and the people you should talk to about the retirement process, it's not something you have to do, it's not a requirement, but you can"'.

Interviewee 44 was not at a point of wanting to start that conversation, and commented that

> 'I've always sensed they think of that as a very dangerous area for them, so no one…. in a position of authority over me has ever said to me, "Are you thinking of retiring?"…. No one tried to stop me continuing, that I would have regarded as sort of interference, but they haven't, and they are obviously cautious and anxious about it not to be seen to engage in old age discrimination.'

Employees' right to request variations in their contracts had been the basis of constructive conversations in several cases, although other interviewees had been unaware of their entitlement to make such a request or had been reluctant to investigate the issue for fear of being treated as a 'lame duck' with limited time left in post or because it might jeopardise any application made in the context of voluntary severance schemes yet to be announced. For these sorts of reasons it made sense for employees 'to play their cards very close to their chest', as one interviewee put it, adding that 'it's very easy to do that now that there is no retirement age' (interviewee 28). An intermediate experience was interviewee 45's, who described his university as having been 'neither proactive nor have they reacted in awkward ways. So once I've said what I wanted to do they have made it possible.'

In philosophical vein, interviewee 26 asked 'Can anybody be prepared for retirement, can any institution prepare you for retirement? I don't think they can.' This interviewee's opinion was based on the view that at the point of retirement so much about the future is unknown, in addition to which consideration has to be given to the distortions that can accompany 'an idealised view of what retirement is'. The dangers of distorted perceptions were also a point of reference in interviewee 14's use of the criminological term 'gate fever' (associated with prisoners' approaching release from incarceration) which he considered might impair judgements about the sustainability of planned future arrangements. In this context, several interviewees spoke of the benefit they had gained from talking to peers who were either going through the same process of deciding whether and when to retire or had done so recently.

> 'I think I came to it gradually. There were two of us who retired simultaneously at [name of university redacted] and that was quite interesting because we both, a year before we retired, identified the possibility of retirement, separately. We then spoke to each other about it and we became sort of supportive…. [She] and I over the last year before we took the plunge talked to each other a lot about retirement, what it would mean, how we felt about it, and so on, and that was very good for both of us, I think, and we retired at the same time' (interviewee 39).

A very similar story was told by interviewee 40 (who is not the colleague talked about by interviewee 39). She had concerns about her prospective retirement being experienced as an abrupt 'ending', and a related 'fear that I might be bored, lonely or become an

irrelevance'. She found that she had this in common with a colleague with whom she developed a mutually-supportive relationship:

> 'I remember talking to [name redacted] who retired exactly the same time as me. We are the same age but she refused to call it retirement…. We both had quite a lot of conversations about this as we were both very nervous about the whole idea, we knew we wanted to do it but we didn't want to suddenly have nothing. The funny thing is we both have a lot of other life'.

They had focussed in particular on their desire to 'put the brakes on a little and start to think about what it [retirement] is going to look like. That's what [name redacted] and I both talked a lot about'. These conversations had continued post-retirement, and included discussion of how their former university has not taken up their offers to continue to contribute and instead 'just acts like we don't exist'. A third interviewee regarded pre-retirement courses put on by universities as potentially useful but that 'it's also about talking with colleagues'; one in particular was described as having been 'a useful sounding board' (interviewee 12), noting especially their confidential conversations about concerns that moving to a fractional contract might be misinterpreted as a prelude to full retirement in the very near future. Of course, not all people approaching retirement have such colleagues, and one survey participant was confronted by 'a large ascertainment bias in getting advice – it was all too easy to find older colleagues still at work who could not understand why one might retire, but I had to go out of my way to find ex-colleagues who had retired'. Contacting them reduced the 'sense of a step into the unknown' (SWIFE#26) and helped a decision to be reached.

It was noted in section 2 that several retired staff associations provided assistance to this project by drawing to their members' attention the opportunity to participate in the survey of retired academics. Such associations have the potential to provide support to retired academics, and one interviewee associated with setting up one at her institution had quickly been made aware of their potential to meet a need by the response given to the initial invitation from one former colleague: 'I retired ten years ago and this is the first time I've had any communication from the university at all'. Subsequent developments confirmed her decision to seek to remedy the situation in which 'all that academic expertise is just chopped off, when it could be used, and people could be working collaboratively' (interviewee 22), and another interviewee described the association as 'very vibrant' (interviewee 32). Retired staff associations put on both social programmes and academic events, and these provided opportunities for retired academics. Quite possibly interviewee 8 was among these given his comment that 'Initially retirement looked like a kind of professional death, but it was evident that people still valued some of the things one could offer and there was an abundance of opportunities which I had not foreseen'. Others mentioned the University of the Third Age (also flagged by retired survey participants, as noted in section 3.a)), and interviewee 1 reported receiving 'lots of invitations, constant invitations to attend reading groups for example, which I enjoy'. More informal gatherings of former colleagues were also reported, although interviewee 30 was keen to dispel the idea that these were primarily for reminiscence about past workplace episodes: 'When I

meet with people from work…. I say to them “well we’ll talk about it for 10 minutes then we’re going to talk about something else…. There’s other things happening in the world, there’s really important things happening in the world that we need to be considering”’. Of course, keeping memories alive is an important part of maintaining identities, and several interviewees drew attention to the oral history project of the Stirling University Retired Staff Association https://sursa.org.uk/sursa-oral-history-project through which accounts of former staff (administrative, technical and campus services as well as academic) and students of the institution have been and continue to be captured and archived.

The sense of one’s place in an unfolding history relates to the idea of succession planning to secure an intellectual legacy that several retired survey participants mentioned. One reported being ‘allowed to plan my own succession and do this gradually over 5 years’, and another told a similar story in more detail: ‘I was able to benefit from the University's flexible retirement scheme, and so worked 3 days per week for 3 years before retirement whilst receiving 80% of pension. This enabled me to relinquish roles and responsibilities in a phased manner and made advance planning much easier’. Among survey participants who were still working was one who was seeking ‘to create “head room” for younger colleagues, especially a select few whom I hope will be able to fill my shoes and keep our group's work going without me (or with only distant mentorship from myself)’. Another was ‘aware of some issues around succession planning and also a responsibility to those I work with and who work for me’, and a third was further on in this process: ‘I have trained and mentored my research team to the point where they can carry on without me. This is a positive thing’. A fourth said simply that it was ‘Time for others to take on responsibilities’, and this ambiguity about the relationship between more established and earlier-career colleagues was conveyed by the retired survey participant who commented ‘I do think that I could/should help more but also feel the next generation have to take things forward and therefore they must initiate any plan for input from retirees’. Another looked back from a decade into his retirement to say that he felt ‘I and my colleagues should have worked harder at succession planning and also that we should have jointly given more consideration to how I could continue to contribute to my department after leaving’ (RSIFE#19), while someone who had retired more recently envisaged a role ‘as an “elder statesman”, advising younger academics’ through whom he could continue to have an influence on future developments.

UK HEIs vary considerably in terms of the documents relating to later careers and retirement that they make publicly available on their websites. Several documents that have been made available include aspirational statements about the institution’s ethos, as my own institution does: ‘The University is committed to helping its employees balance their personal and work commitments. We also recognise that there is mutual benefit in supporting employees who wish to take a phased approach to full retirement’. Another HEI has as one of its stated aims ‘To accommodate where possible the desire of employees to balance their role at the University with other commitments or interests’, and the pursuit of flexible working (which applies to all career stages, not only the later ones) was described by a third as ‘an important initiative in our ambition to create and sustain a world class working

environment for all our staff that is fit for the 21st Century'. This HEI elaborated on the evidence-based rationale that underpins its approach to flexible working:

> 'The evidence suggests that flexible working delivers mutual benefits including a more positive work life balance, a means of managing stress, improvements to performance and productivity as well as a way of attracting talent to the workplace. In addition, it delivers greater equality and diversity as people feel empowered to manage their workload around other non-work responsibilities that might otherwise have restricted their career choices and progression. The University acknowledges the mutual benefits of flexible working and is committed to developing an enabling culture where a healthy work-life balance is the norm and where employees are empowered to work in an agile manner to do their best work.'

Some websites included the personal stories of employees to bring the policies to life. One concerned a university employee who had taken advantage of the HEI's flexible retirement policy to move to a fractional contract in order 'to juggle work and home life in a more relaxed way' while retaining 'that sense of belonging and part of my identity' derived from work. Another featured the heart-warming story of a member of staff who was about to retire after 54 years of service, the last 40 of which he had been married to his wife whom he had met at the University.

The title of a one-day workshop put on by an HEI for its later career staff, 'Retirement: opportunity and choice', conveys a simple, positive message, and some other websites have a similar flavour. One states that 'each member of staff has the right to determine the date on which they will retire'. For another,

> 'The default retirement age (formerly 65) has been phased out and most people can now work for as long as they want to. The change doesn't mean you cannot retire. Instead the decision about whether or not to retire and when, is now your choice rather than your employer's. We do not have a compulsory retirement age for staff…. but recognise that many staff will still want to retire depending on their individual circumstances and lifestyle choices'.

Another placed the onus on the individual staff member to start the process: 'Members of staff can voluntarily retire at a time of their choosing', with it being regarded as 'an individual's choice as to how long they wish to carry on working and the onus will be on the individual to inform the University when they wish to resign or retire from their employment'. These statements are consistent with the views expressed above by interviewees that the initiative lies with employees, but other HEI websites had a quite different tone. One described retirement as 'a process, to be negotiated between the employee and the University, by which an employee ends his or her paid employment', and went on to encourage employees and managers to visit the subject routinely:

> Retirement plans should be discussed between the employee and his/her manager in the context of the regular Performance and Development Reviews…. All PDR Reviews should include a question regarding the employee's plans concerning their employment over the coming years. This will be an invitation for them to discuss any

> plans for leaving the University – or indeed for changing their working arrangements or the nature of their work. It is important to be clear that discussing an intention or plan to retire does not constitute a binding commitment on the employee. The ideal is for there to be an open and honest dialogue between the employee and manager. Retirement is likely to be a major step for the employee, which may cause some anxiety. The employee may be attracted to some kind of arrangement that phases the process of withdrawing from full-time work. This could take the form of a request for a period of part-time working, and/or an adjustment to the duties of the role. It is essential that managers do not feel they have to agree any such requests… Employers are entitled to expect that employees will engage in an open and constructive manner during these discussions'.

Another HEI's position was that 'it is appropriate that a discussion should take place with an employee at appraisal regarding where they see themselves in the next few years and how they see their contribution to the University'. Such discussions could include an employee's thinking about retirement, to assist workforce planning. A third was less directive, acknowledging 'that employees are not obliged to or simply may not wish to discuss their retirement plans or subsequent formal notice of retirement' before making the case for the benefits of doing so, and offering reassurance to those who do:

> 'discussion on such matters is encouraged in order to enable a structured and supportive approach by the University for the benefit of the individual employee and for the University and/or the School/Service from which they are retiring in respect of workforce planning, etc. Any such discussion(s) about possible retirement will not result in the University making any assumptions about the employee's commitment'.

Employees are being given contrasting messages on the question of whether to discuss plans for retirement during their annual reviews: that they 'should', that it is 'appropriate' for them to do so, and that they are not 'obliged' to do so.

Of course, the degree of choice available to staff at HEIs that operate with fixed retirement ages is already limited. One HEI that operates an EJRA operates 'a fixed retirement age which is the 31 July following an employee's 68th birthday', offering six justifications:

> • Safeguarding the high standards of the University in teaching, research and professional services;
>
> • Promoting inter-generational fairness and maintaining opportunities for career progression for those at particular stages of a career, given the importance of having available opportunities for progression across the generations, in order, in particular, to refresh the academic, research and other professional workforce and to enable them to maintain the University's position on the international stage;
>
> • Facilitating succession planning by maintaining predictable retirement dates;
>
> • Facilitating flexibility through turnover in the workforce, especially at a time of headcount restraint, to respond to the changing business needs of the University;

• Minimising the impact on morale by using a predictable retirement date to manage the expected cuts in public funding by retiring staff at the default retirement age; and

• Avoiding performance management and redundancy procedures to consider the termination of employment at the end of a long career, where the performance of the individual and/or the needs of the University have changed.

This list is of interest, not only because of the views expressed by some participants in this study (reported above in section 3.b)) regarding the 'spurious' nature of EJRA justifications, but also because other HEIs' EJRA justifications differ by including, in one case, the promotion of innovation and the preservation of academic freedom, and in another 'improvements in diversity'. Furthermore, it raises the question of why other HEIs have not felt the need to go down the EJRA route.

It is certainly the case that the tone of the justifications offered for EJRAs can be found elsewhere. One HEI's documents set out the view that declining productivity with age needs to be guarded against:

> 'The University expects all its employees to perform their duties to a high standard, whatever their age…. it may well amount to unfair age discrimination not to address performance issues because of age. The University fully accepts that there is no particular age at which performance will deteriorate, although at some point deterioration is inevitable. There is evidence indicating that some abilities do tend to decline with age (and some, such as perceptual speed, from a relatively early age). This may be compensated by the acquisition of skills and experience. Currently [2011], the majority of employees retire before they reach [state] pension age'.

Another raises questions about older workers' capabilities and motivation by recognising 'the importance of ensuring that all employees are supported to continue working for as long as they are capable, skilled and motivated to do so, adhering to the principles set out in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy', going on to suggest that phased retirement may 'help the University with its succession planning, and help the employee to adjust to, and prepare for, retirement'. The prospect identified by one HEI for flexible working to bring 'efficiency gains' appears aimed more at managers than later career staff, and another's stated ambition 'to foster a truly diverse community in which for example, gender and age are properly represented' suggests that an EJRA is not required to achieve this. A balanced approach saw one HEI identify four potential benefits for employees of flexible retirement alongside five 'employer benefits', and a desire for balance also informed the HEI which

> 'believes that staff should, wherever possible, be permitted to continue working for as long as they wish to do so provided that they are making a full and high level contribution…. Of course for academic staff it also wishes to see a good mix of experience with the opportunity for academics elsewhere, in for example the early stages of their career, being able to join and contribute to [the HEI]'.

It should not, of course, be concluded from this discussion that HEIs operating EJRAs are distinct in all aspects of their retirement policies, and operating an EJRA may even sharpen up good practice, as in the case of the HEI that advises managers and heads of departments to begin meetings with prospective retirees 'by thanking the staff member for their service'. This may seem an obvious thing to do, but the interviewees' accounts of their career endings discussed earlier in this section indicates that even such basic civility is not always observed.

The further information provided on websites sometimes gives the impression of retirement being approached as a technical exercise. Resources available include a 'flexible working toolkit', a 'retirement planning toolkit' at another, and a 'leavers framework' at a third. Closer inspection of such documents reveals them to include things that several participants in this research have indicated they would have found useful to have available to them. The 'retirement planning toolkit' takes as its starting point that 'It is never too early to begin planning', and aims its advice to people who may still be a decade away from retirement. This HEI worked with a broad understanding of its responsibilities, providing both informal and more formal contexts in which staff are given the opportunity to discuss retirement-related issues, and advice about 'everyday health and wellbeing' in retirement, about finances and pensions, and about volunteering opportunities. Its activities include asking people to consider 'How do I visualise my retirement?' (which coincidentally has something in common with the visualisation exercise that interviewees in this project were asked to undertake) and the advice to 'talk to others' (which various interviewees recommended). This HEI also has a retired staff association which it encourages its former employees to join, and is supportive of staff staying in touch with the University more generally. By contrast, some HEIs give the impression of being disproportionately concerned to justify particular policies, such as why staff are not entitled to keep email accounts after retirement. On some websites the 'frequently asked questions' format is used to deal with anticipated queries such as 'What happens if I apply for a job at the University and am over 65?' (to which the answer is 'You will be assessed on merit against the requirements of the role and person specification for the job. Your age will not be a factor in the assessment.'), and HEIs operating EJRAs to which 'exceptional circumstances' may be used as exemptions unsurprisingly have to devote space to specifying these. The more general point is that UK HEIs that make their policy documents easily available publicly are remarkably diverse in what they cover, the detail in which they cover issues, and the tone in which they do so. Excerpts have been taken in this section from only 20 HEIs, which in turn are a minority of the total number of UK HEIs. Among these 20, several have taken on board Tizard's remarks on retired staff's involuntary disengagement and feelings of being excluded from the academic community' (2004: 261), but in others this remains, at best, a work in progress.

Section 4. Conclusions and recommendations.

This project set out to explore the later careers and retirement of UK-based academics as a type of ending. The title of the project embodies the assumption that retirement is a process that is open to being managed by academics and/or their employing organizations. Although that assumption has proven broadly correct, there are significant variations in the extent to which this is true, for both parties: some academics, and some organizations, exercise greater degrees of control over the process, or at least have stronger negotiating positions, than others. Whatever the reasons for these variations, the definitional challenges surrounding 'retirement' must first be rehearsed. The statement found on one HEI website that 'Retirement is when an employee leaves work to take their pension' is an oversimplification in two important respects. First, it is now possible for academics from the age of 55 to start drawing on their occupational pension, ahead of fully retiring, thanks to the options provided by flexible retirement. It is possible to combine – or, at least, to request to combine – a fractional contract of employment with drawing on one's pension. Secondly, even when they are no longer in receipt of an income from paid work, academics do not necessarily leave work in the sense of stopping the activity. Academics retire and take up emeritus positions, for example, to *continue* with work. These complications presented an immediate challenge for this project's ambition to collect data from both 'working' and 'retired' academics, and the creation of surveys for academics whose main source of income was from either paid work or pensions dealt with this challenge only imperfectly. There are, as became abundantly clear from both interviewees and survey participants, a host of possible ways in which later career and retired academics may combine income from pensions with income from paid work of various sorts, including consultancy. Adding unpaid work into these scenarios merely compounds the complexity. Lain's (2018: 107) analysis of longitudinal employment data relating to people over 65 differentiated between 'stayers' (who remained in the same job), 'movers' (who moved to new jobs), 'returners' (who went back to a job after a period away), 'fleeting workers' (who had more episodic involvement in paid work) and 'leavers' (who left work for good), and this classification reveals the inadequacy of focussing only on the two extremes of academics who never retire and those who make a clean break from the job.

The discussion of intermediate situations between the extremes helps to understand how the apparently antithetical statements by Back and Bauman in the opening paragraph of section 1 can be reconciled if the former is taken to be referring to retirement as leaving academic activity behind and the latter referring to no longer being paid by a university. Various participants in this study highlighted the potential for confusion that these rival understandings of 'retirement' can cause, and there is no set way of describing a person who leaves paid work to devote more time to academic endeavours (as Bauman did). Added to this is the point made by some interviewees that not everyone likes to apply the word 'retired' to themselves because of its perceived negative associations with disengagement and loss. Separate but related challenges relate to the usage of the word 'career'. One issue with this term is the question of whether careers are approached as comprising a series of stages set (or if not set then at least shaped) by employing organizations, professional norms and other structural influences, or whether they are better understood as projects in

which the construction of individual identity is more central (Du Gay 1996: ch.1). In practical terms these contrasting perspectives mean that some participants in this study saw the termination of their employment as coterminous with the end of their career, but others regarded retirement as ushering in a new career stage. Alongside this debate is the related discussion of whether careers can be planned or are serendipitous, dependent on chance openings that are difficult to predict. The organizational theorist Stewart Clegg notes of his career that it had involved 'a lot of moments of doubt and uncertainty' but nevertheless has had some structure to it:

> 'Some careers are a string of discontinuous projects, perhaps. Mine hasn't been like that – I see it as one big project…. and I've just negotiated the breaks that appeared along the way. There was never any grand plan to do anything in particular. One thing tended to lead to another. There was a consistency to the analytic directions…. I tend to think of it…. as a degree of randomness upon which one seeks to impose a pattern' (1996: 53).

This account resembles the narratives offered by many participants in this study regarding their careers which, when looking back, have a certain logic to them, even though the direction of travel would not have been apparent at the outset, or perhaps was so only in the broadest of terms. Of course, the more that careers are invested with meaning by individuals as they proceed, the more mindful one should be of Bourdieu's warnings about 'the biographical illusion', as discussed in section 3.d). A career trajectory may take an individual to a central position but, Bourdieu notes, such an outcome will reflect the effects of the 'network structure' (2000: 302) within which that individual operates as well as his or her own efforts. Moreover, as the discussion of centripetal and centrifugal forces in section 3.c) showed, an individual can move both away from as well as towards a central position, and this will also not be attributable entirely to that individual's own efforts (and may, indeed, be *despite* them).

The uncertainty surrounding later careers and retirement from academia is a theme that came through strongly in the findings. In relation to the issue of what retirement is and what it looks like, for many participants who were still working (defined for these purposes as receiving the majority of their income from paid work) retirement was uncharted territory, or a stage of life about which they may have made plans but not necessarily confidence in the appropriateness of those plans. Several participants who had retired (defined as receiving the majority of their income from pensions) provided accounts that were consistent with this, noting that retirement had turned out to be surprising in various respects, both positive and negative. The analysis of the photographic images of retirement also highlighted uncertainty with regard to how best to capture it visually, and wariness of idealised images was expressed as a way of conveying the potential gap between imagined futures and more prosaic realities. These uncertainties about what retirement will be like figure prominently in the decisions made about whether and when to retire. Hindsight led one interviewee to wish that she had made the move ten years sooner than she had, although this was an unusual scenario. Gaining certainty about one's financial security (and that of one's dependants) in retirement stood out as important in both the survey and

interview data, but nervousness about what life would be like without the everyday structuring of work routines came across as harder to assuage, at least for those participants whose core identities were built around academic endeavour. Such people have been described as facing nothing less than 'a loss of world' (Rosa 2019: 237). This appears to be a significant element in the thinking of later career academics who take up the opportunities provided by flexible working and flexible retirement. Fractional contracts offer possibilities to explore different work-life balances and through those an insight into what retirement might be like. University policy documents are uniform in declaring support for such arrangements, and although they emphasise that applications may be declined on various grounds, no such cases were encountered during the course of this research project. There are, of course, many other uncertainties that have to be contended with, including the vicissitudes that dog all academic activities from the unpredictability surrounding the reception of one's latest teaching, publication, or grant application to the impact of the periodic restructuring to which universities are routinely subjected. COVID-19 provided a forceful reminder of how uncertainties may derail the best-laid plans, as references by participants to the disruption caused by the pandemic to their scheduled trajectory towards retirement revealed.

Alongside uncertainty, another theme that runs through the findings is that of academic endeavours being more than just a job. Some participants discussed this by using the concept of vocation, the idea of an occupation that demands particular dedication and becomes central to people's identity. This perspective proved especially illuminating with regard to academics' motivations since there is a good deal in how participants speak about their passionate commitment to their careers that is reminiscent of Weber's famous lecture 'Science as a Vocation', notwithstanding that Weber's emphasis on the prominent roles played by chance and by patronage in academic advancement in early-twentieth-century German universities 'did not make scholarship sound very exciting to most people' (Radkau 2009: 488). For those academics who have spent three, four or even five decades immersed in teaching, researching and related administration, the prospect of giving this up and spending their time on other activities can represent a threat to their sense of who they are. Some of those to whom this applies may seek to defer retirement for as long as possible. Others may seek to maintain elements of their sense of self through continued connections to the academic world, perhaps through part-time or emeritus appointments, or consultancy work, or through voluntary roles that make use of their academic skills. In these and other ways, academic identities can be sustained post-retirement. By contrast, universities may come to be regarded as akin to Lewis Coser's (1974) 'greedy institutions or even Erving Goffman's (1968) 'total institutions' from which it is imperative to escape if one is to avoid the very different career of constrained 'inmate'. This perspective of retirement requiring a clean break, leaving academia and academic identity behind, has also been encountered during the course of this project. Bourdieu's description of being 'deprived of, or liberated from, the powers and privileges but also the tasks and the responsibilities of the ordinary professor' (1988: xix) offers a way of representing competing understandings of leaving academic positions and identities that captures the ambiguity inherent in such situations.

The findings also point to a third general theme relating to trajectories and turning points, as was anticipated in the discussion of the literature in section 1. Careers do not run smoothly, and at key moments may be marked by changes of direction, if not radical discontinuities, which together can have the appearance of a zigzag pathway (Neale 2021: 41). Several epiphanal moments feature in participants' career narratives similar to Gaskill's (2020) description of reaching a point where he 'realised I'd said all I had to say' in his academic role and left it behind. As was noted above, running out of ideas had been a factor in 6% of retired survey participants' timing of retirement, while 15% of still working survey participants envisaged it playing some part in their decision to retire. Interviewee 4's account of her decision to retire (pp.34-5 above) and interviewee 35's description of the moment he resolved to 'get his jotters' (p.40) both relate to career endings, but interviewee 28's recollection of the point at which his career moved in the direction of management and administration (p.57) relates to mid-career, and the health-related stories of several interviewees (pp.32-3) indicate that reflection leading to reorientation can come at any time. Health issues figure as an important prompt to re-consideration of what is widely referred to as 'work-life balance' and changed evaluations of priorities, but others also feature in people's accounts of how their thinking changed over time. There were, for example, several reflections from interviewees and survey participants on the position an individual holds in a departmental or research unit team, including moments of realisation that they might themselves become the much-derided figure of the person who continues to 'hang about' beyond the point when they are making a valued contribution (pp.37-8 above). Elias's concept of the 'We/I balance' is useful here, not least because of the suggestion that the relative weight attached to the group and the individual is gendered, with women being more community-minded (Crow and Laidlaw 2019). The data collected for this project are not conclusive on this matter; if anything, men are more likely to include making way for the next generation as a reason for retiring, although this may change as the effects of pensions equalisation work themselves out and the debate intensifies about the consequences for younger academics of the move away from fixed retirement ages.

A fourth general theme is consistent with the basic tenet of comparative research that context, both temporal and geographical, matters and should lead to caution about overgeneralization (Crow 1997). The participants in this study have lived through major changes to the number, size, structures, cultures and stated ambitions of UK HEIs, and for this reason several expressed wariness of treating their own experiences or those of their contemporaries as role models for later generations (Crow 2020e). In addition, the inclusion in the interview sample of 24 participants from Scotland brought home that English practice is not necessarily duplicated north of the border, just as we know that the French Universities in the 1960s and 1970s studied by Bourdieu (1988) had distinctive features. Lorraine Dorfman (1989) found retired British academics felt the loss of facilities and professional services more keenly than their American counterparts, against the background of what A. H. Halsey (1995) identified as a pervasive sense of decline compared to past eras of UK higher education. That said, comparative research revealed similarities between the ways in which male academics in Brazil and the UK achieve continuity in retirement by keeping up elements of the job which were core to their identities, which they most

enjoyed, and/or which were associated with their career accomplishments (Rowson and Phillipson 2020). Furthermore, some of the advice proffered to early career researchers by participants in this study is of the form that has the potential to apply in other contexts as well. Indeed, the advice to be flexible and open to a range of opportunities is consistent with Eleanor Davies and Andrew Jenkins's (2013) study's finding that adaptability is a useful attitude for older academics to have as well, helping them as they go through the process of retiring.

The fieldwork for Davies and Jenkins's study was conducted prior to the establishment of the new norm of there being no fixed retirement age (introduced in late 2011), and their 32 interviewees were geographically concentrated in the Midlands and the North of England, but their typology of 'clean breakers', 'opportunists', 'continuing scholars', 'the reluctant' and 'avoiders' (2013: 328) is one that has a good deal of correspondence with the findings of this study. 'Clean breakers' using retirement to make a fresh start in their lives and 'continuing scholars' who maintain academic interests, running them down only gradually over the longer term, are two types that are immediately recognisable, while the 'opportunists' who develop new professional interests resemble the interviewees and survey participants in this study whose retirement included venturing into consultancy and other fresh fields for the application of their professional skills. The final two of Davies and Jenkins's types are less immediately recognisable from the data analysed above, although there are expressions there of the anger, powerlessness and disheartened state of 'the reluctant' (attributed to their involuntary loss of role and status) and of the absence of clear plans and resultant anxiety of the 'avoiders'. This was quite a contrasting sample to the current study's, being significantly younger (average age 62, with none aged over 70) and with a higher proportion of males (78%) and of post-1992 HEI staff (72%). Nevertheless, Davies and Jenkins's argument that people whose primary duties were teaching and management were more likely to follow the 'clean breaker' and 'avoider' trajectories while those who primary duties were research were more likely to be found among the 'continuing scholars' and 'the reluctant', with senior managers becoming 'opportunists', is a plausible one. Furthermore, the study's conclusion that 'universities are not idylls for all older staff who wish to continue links post-retirement' (2013: 336) provides a useful pointer regarding the issue of where improvements in support made available by HEIs to later career and retiring staff might be most needed.

Academics and their universities are in a position to do something about all three of the issues of uncertainty, identity and turning points, and to learn by adopting a comparative perspective. This leads to three recommendations, framed as encouragement to pursue or renew ongoing conversations. The first of these conversations was actually suggested by an interviewee, who noted that human resources staff at different HEIs might usefully be brought together to discuss issues such as best practice around later careers and retirement, including the vexed issue of EJRAs. The Retirement Planning Toolkit provided by the University of Sheffield https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/retirement is useful in a number of respects, including its recognition that preparation for retirement is a long-term process that benefits from careful reflection and conversations with others; their suggestion that this process might start up to ten years before retirement, made on the grounds that 'it

is never too early to begin planning', could have been framed with Davies and Jenkins's 'avoiders' in mind! The Sheffield documentation also makes clear that retirement can be 'early', 'normal', 'late' and 'flexible', and contains advice not only about pensions and money (which many other HEI websites do as well) but also, more unusually, about everyday health and wellbeing and guidance concerning volunteering opportunities. The tone of the documents is positive (e.g. 'When you retire we hope that you will retain a link with the University through the services we offer') and the structures are in place to facilitate the objectives, in this example the existence of a retired staff association. The documents are tailored for both later career staff and managers who administer the retirement process. Other HEIs may have similar resources available, but Sheffield's are readily accessible to people outside of the University as well as internally, and so contribute to what can be learned through adopting a comparative perspective. The recommendation to UK HEIs to deepen dialogues around how their policies and resources relating to later academic careers and retirement compare when placed alongside other HEIs' arrangements is an obvious one to make, as is the recommendation to include trades unions in these conversations so that employees' voices are heard.

A second recommendation also relates to making use of material already available, in the form of a conversation between past, present and future. Ray Pahl's favoured maxim 'Always begin with history' (Crow and Takeda 2011) provides a solid starting point for consideration of the future both of individuals and collectivities, for example through the array of biographical material relating to past academics who in one way or another serve as role models who have successfully managed career ending. These materials include obituaries, biographies and autobiographies, and the history of academic disciplines and institutions. Studying them has the potential to pay dividends in unexpected ways. The obituary of Sir Aaron Klug highlighted his advice to 'equip yourself to do a wider range of things than you are actually interested in immediately. You never know what might pay off' (Ferry 2018), which has relevance well beyond his own fields of science. So does Charlotte Nassim's reflection that 'great science can still be done by the intelligence of someone like Eve Marder, without technical fireworks or lavish funding'; Nassim's description of Marder's work space as 'a disorder of papers, journals, data printouts, and notes that transcends the word "untidy"' (2018: xix, xvii) is also revealing. A further source of ideas that can contribute to easing the process of adjustment to later careers and retirement lies in the literature offering advice and guidance to early career researchers which previous generations have found effective. This material has the potential to apply to all career stages. For example, Kate Woodthorpe's advice on 'keeping plaudits' as a counterweight to 'moments of disheartenment' (2018: 224) brings to mind the recognition by an interviewee in this study that these things have ongoing importance:

> 'I have a file in my office, about 3 inches fat now, it's bulging, and in it are all the cards students have given me, emails from PhD students, or generous acknowledgements, off the radar, they weren't public, person to person communications, and it's fat, 3 or 4 inches fat, I'll need another file actually, and I'll read it again in 10 years' time as soul food. There will be a time when I'll read that

> file again…. it's a kind of inventory of those kind of things that I think are valuable in a scholarly life' (interviewee 34).

It is instructive that Davies and Jenkins use the word 'disheartened' to characterise their 'reluctant' type of older and retired academics, and we saw in table 2 in section 3.c) that alienation may be associated a loss of a sense of purpose. It is not only early-career staff to whom Iain Hay's observations about a link between 'job satisfaction' and 'receiving positive, unsolicited feedback' (2017: 7) apply. Woodthorpe's and Hay's books contain a host of other advice that is useful well beyond the early career stage, such as their reflections on people's propensity to misperceive the sources of satisfaction, happiness and wellbeing which chime with the discussion of the desirability of balance in sections 3.b) and 3.c).

A third recommendation is to encourage conversations about the value of approaching later academic careers and retirement comparatively in a geographical sense. Contexts vary. Hay makes a point of noting that his approach to advising on careers has been 'informed by extant literature, extensive discussions with colleagues, and over 30 years of observation and experience around the world' (2017: 4), his own base being Australia. Marian Mahat and Jennifer Tatebe's (2019) book on academic careers draws on material from the Australia, New Zealand, the USA, the UK, Latin America, Finland and Austria. Rowson and Phillipson (2020) compare later careers and retirement in Brazil and the UK. Writing in the Canadian context, Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber drew on evidence from several countries besides, including Australia and the UK, to make the case for the slow professor's prioritization of 'deliberation over acceleration' as part of their critique of 'neoliberal models of higher education and the masculinization of the academy' (2016: xviii, 89). Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie argue that the growth of 'academic capitalism' can be traced back to the 1980s in the UK, USA and Australia (1997: ch.2). The USA provided a point of comparison for Weber's (1970) analysis of trends in German Universities and, more recently, Halsey's study of UK academia in which he wrote that

> 'the United States of America is a historical demonstration of the power of the market to produce a system that is responsive, flexible, and embraces large numbers, though it also has a curriculum – a range of studies – which no traditional European aristocrat would have recognised as part of a university education…. The consequences for the academic career are profound' (1995: 12).

Comparison can, of course, reveal similarities as well as differences, and for this reason it might be difficult to place the account of an academic approaching the age of 70 who was, he noticed, 'being treated like an old man, lots of past tense and use of me by younger colleagues as a memory bank'. It comes, in fact, from Halsey's autobiography (1996: 2), but might easily have come from any number of people including contemporaries such as Hoggart (2005), or others in different places and times. It would not have been out of place in the material provided by the present study's participants, including those whose later careers and retirement left them feeling 'scunnered'. Halsey was resignedly philosophical about the experience, but it is nevertheless part of a pattern of marginalising older academics (of which there are, as we have seen, much harsher examples) that we may wish to see changed. Keeping up the conversation is one possible route to achieving that.

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Table 3. Research project outputs

Research note 1. Managing career endings and the transition to retirement: the case of academics https://www.academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk/managing-career-endings-and-the-transition-to-retirement-the-case-of-academics/
Research note 2. What is academic retirement? https://www.academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk/research-note-2-what-is-academic-retirement/
Research note 3. Lessons from academic careers. https://www.academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk/research-note-3-lessons-from-academic-careers/ Published in *Discover Society* 05/06/2020
Research note 4. The condensed lives of sociologists. https://www.academic-career-ending.sps.ed.ac.uk/research-note-4-the-condensed-lives-of-sociologists/ Published in *Everyday Society* 11/06/2020
Research note 5. Is the concept of academic role model primed for an update? Published by *Times Higher Education Supplement* 18/09/2020 https://www.timeshighereducation.com/career/concept-academic-role-model-primed-update
Research note 6. Academic careers as games. Published by *Times Higher Education Supplement* 29/01/2021
Research note 7. Collecting data online is fast, but do we lose too much context? Published by Times Higher Education Supplement 05/02/2021
Crow, G. (2020) 'Hedgehogs, foxes, and other embodiments of academics' career trajectories', *Contemporary Social Science* 15(5) pp.577-94 https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2020.1849784

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