

**“A qualitative investigation of retention of Generation Z
Engineers in the Electricity Supply Board (ESB)”**

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Abstract:

This qualitative research explores the key factors influencing the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB. Generation Z have begun to enter the workforce and will account for a significant portion of the workforce in the upcoming years.

Currently the energy sector is dealing with a shortage of engineers, there is also a huge demand for engineers in order to achieve Ireland's renewable energy goals. Companies are struggling to recruit and retain engineers across Ireland. While there is a multitude of research regarding retention, and also research regarding Generation Z, there was a gap in the literature regarding the retention of Generation Z engineers.

This study will explore generational theory and will focus on the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z engineers in ESB towards career progression, their specific learning and development expectations, work-life balance and salary. Through gaining an in-depth understanding of Generation Z engineers attitudes and behaviours towards career progression, their specific learning and development expectations, work-life balance and salary in terms of retention. The findings of this research will then be used to suggest effective retention strategies for Generation Z engineers in ESB.

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Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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List of Abbreviations;

ESB -Electricity Supply Board

HRM – Human Resource Management

HR – Human Resources

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

Chapter One: Introduction

Globally, organisations are facing exceptional challenges in sourcing talent as well as managing performance and retention as competition for talent has increased. According to Deloitte (2021), talent demands are increasing globally which is putting more pressure on organisations to source talent, with a significant number of executives having concerns regarding talent shortage. 63% of executives surveyed identified retention as either a high or very high concern.

Within the energy sector, there is a significant shortage and huge competition for engineers. There is a huge focus on the importance of renewable energy in Ireland and Europe, naturally as a result of this, there are immense amount of opportunities available for those that wish to pursue a career within the environmental sector (Irish Examiner, 2022). According to Donohue (2021), engineers are vital to the design construction and operation of wind and solar energy developments. The main engineering disciplines required are Civil, Mechanical and Electrical engineering, as well as a need for more specialised areas such as environmental, energy and marine engineering. In order for Ireland to achieve the ambitious 80% renewable electricity target by 2030, it is estimated that 7,020 additional jobs will need to be created (Irish Examiner, 2022). While engineers are inevitably in demand, Ireland's National Skill Strategy 2025 highlights the challenges with skills shortages for Professionals and Associate Professionals across sectors in areas of ICT, Science and Engineering. (O'Sullivan & English, Unknown). Currently, there is a huge demand for engineers, the National Skills Bulletin 2021 highlighted, approximately 40% of all vacancy adverts in 2020, accounted for professional occupations with two thirds of professional vacancy adverts accounting for ICT or engineering roles (SOLAS, 2021). Additionally, In a survey carried out by Engineers Ireland (2022), it found that in 2022, 84% agreed that there were a vast amount of job opportunities available, an increase of 17 percentage points from the previous year. This is the highest level recorded by Engineers Ireland in the past five years. Furthermore, over 81% of professionals in the area indicated that their organisation plans to recruit engineers in 2022. Not surprisingly, SOLAS found that over half science, engineering and technology companies are having difficulty in recruiting software developers, designers, engineers and technical support staff. (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2021).

The Electricity Supply Board (ESB), the leading energy company in Ireland, will play a pivotal role in enabling Ireland to meet its renewable energy demands. First established in 1927, the ESB operates across the electricity market, supplying, distributing and generating electricity all over Ireland (ESB, 2022). The vision of ESB is to be the leading energy company in the all-island market, bringing competitive and sustainable energy solutions to its customers. (ESB, 2022) ESB's strategy statement is "Through our diverse businesses across Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain we aim to meet customer energy needs by bringing the best of our capabilities together to deliver innovative and value-driven solutions for a low-carbon world." ESB, 2022). ESB's employees over 7,000 staff and its employees are a critical component in the delivery of ESB's Net Zero by 2040 strategy but in particular engineering employees are a vital element of achieving Net Zero by 2040. Trends in the renewable energy sector demonstrate that the demand for medium-skilled (supervisory/technician/skilled crafts) and high-skilled (professional/managerial) professionals will increase, due to the rise of remote operation and automation requests ICT (information and communications technology) skills and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) skills for these profiles (Arcelay, et al., 2021).

Furthermore, ESB has recently launched a recruitment campaign to recruit 1,000 employees over the next three years. ESB will be recruiting for critical roles which include, Engineering, IT, Finance, Procurement, Customer Service, HR, and Qualified Electrician. In terms of engineering roles, in particular ESB will be focusing on recruiting Offshore wind, renewables, network planning, asset development, environmental, civil, electrical and mechanical and environment (marine biologists and geologists, geotechnical roles and hydrology scientists),. ESB will be recruiting over 300 graduates, apprentices and trainees over the next three years, 150 of these roles will be engineering graduate roles. Over the last two years, ESB had an intake of 60 engineering graduates across multiple engineering disciplines, including; Electrical, Mechanical, Civil and Quantity Surveying, many of these 60 engineering graduates that have started over the last two years will fall in the Generation Z cohort. ESB will be targeting recent engineering graduates for its upcoming recruitment campaign to recruit 150 graduate engineers over the next three years, these recent graduates will most likely predominately fall into the category of Generation Z, and therefore it is particularly important that HR professionals in ESB understand Generation Z's unique characteristics and needs in order to attract Generation Z engineers and to implement effective retention strategies for this generational cohort.

Mainheim' (1952) in (Moore & Krause, 2021) discusses generational theory, which will be discussed more in depth suggests that generations attributes and characteristics are shaped by their historical period. Generational theory in the workplace presents an important facet for exploration. Moreover, Generation Z defined as people born after 1995 (Levickaite, 2010) has already begun to enter the workforce. Generation Z will soon account for a significant proportion of the workforce, according to Zurich (2022), by 2025 Generation Z will account for 27% of the workforce. As Mainheim' (1952) generational theory would indicate, Generation Z employees have a unique and distinct set of values and attributes which affect their attitudes towards work. It is important to understand Generation Z attitudes and behaviours towards work, in order for Human Resource Management to develop effective Talent Management and Retention strategies. Bussin (2018), defines retention as a process which employees are encouraged to remain with an organisation for as long as possible. (Lee, et al., 2021) highlights a lack of research in terms of Generation Z's motivating factors in Generation Z's employees decision to remain with an organisation. Moreover, there is a distinct gap in the literature pertaining to the retention of Generation Z Engineers.

This research is being undertaken to gain an in depth understanding of the factors influencing the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB. This research will focus on the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z engineers in ESB towards career progression, their specific learning and development expectations, work-life balance and salary. Through gaining an in-depth understanding of Generation Z engineers attitudes and behaviours towards career progression, their specific learning and development expectations, work-life balance and salary in terms of retention, the findings of this research can then be used to implement effective retention strategies for Generation Z engineers in ESB.

The next chapter will outline the relevant and recent literature on the topic, following this the research aims and objectives will be defined. The chosen methodology will then outlined and discussed in detail. Following this the a detailed account of the findings will be presented. The findings of the researcher and the literature review will be discussed in more detail and the final chapter will conclude the study and provide recommendations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Generational Theory Background

Manheim's (1952) in Moore and Krause (2021) study of generational groups suggest that particular birth groups have a common range of experiences which produce certain characteristics, these characteristics in question prepare them for action relevant to their historical period. Strauss and Howe (1991) in Moore and Krause (2021) identified four generational groups in the labour force: Traditionalists produced by World War II, Boomers developed from the Cold War, Gen X developed by economic and social upheaval during the 1960's and 1970's and Gen Y (Millennials) developed from the technology revolution in the 1990's. A fifth generational cohort has been identified; Generation Z, people born after 1995, they are known as children of the internet, the digital generation, digital natives, and the media generation (Levickaite, 2010). For the purpose of this study, Generation Z will be defined as being born from 1995. It is highly likely that there will be multiple generation groups working within an organisation, research evidence indicates that generational diversity affects every aspect of the workplace, including their approaches to work or work related attributes (Dokadia, et al., 2015).

However, there is an increasing amount of literature which points out that generational differences do not have any impact on people that are born in various time periods, that the attributes or characteristics associated with the generational cohorts to do not have any relation with how an individual acts in the workplace. (Rudolph & Zacher, 2018), evaluated a number of arguments both for and against generational theory, they found that often critics perceive that generational theory is nothing more than merely a 'management fad'. (Lyons & Kuran, 2014) pointed out the need for a greater qualitative understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, recent studies have concluded that intergenerational differences are flawed and that generational research is inadequate pertaining to methodology and theoretical background (Van Rossem, 2019).

Although there is some literature that underlines the weaknesses in the importance of studying generational differences, there is a substantial amount of research that supports the importance of studying generational differences, indicating that generational differences do have an impact on the way an employee behaves. (Akhavan Sarraf, et al., 2017)

Arguments which support the theory of generational differences, often refer to the observation that the workforce and the workplace are changing rapidly, this is an observation which is difficult for critics to dispute (Rudolph & Zacher, 2018).

2.2 Understanding Generation Z: Characteristics

As it has been previously mentioned, Generation Z have begun to enter the work-force and they will soon make up a significant proportion of the work-force. Taking Mainheim's (1952) generational theory into consideration as discussed in more detail previously, it is important that HR professionals have an understanding of Generation Z's characteristics in order to implement effective retention strategies.

Generation Z, often referred to as 'digital natives' have been immersed in the world of technology since they have been born. They have grown up with instant access to the internet and as a result they cannot recall a time when they were without social media. Also, inspired by the word "zappers", Generation Z gets its name from characteristics aimed at rapid changes, this is because they are prepared to deal with sudden changes and they live at a faster pace than previous generations (Pauli, et al., 2020).

Berkup (2014) in (Pauli, et al., 2020), describes Generation Z characteristics as confidence, individualism, freedom, speed, and technological dependence. Generation Z are perceived to be skilled at multitasking, members of Generation Z can become easily bored and unmotivated when given monotonous repetitive tasks (Janssen & Carradini, 2021).

(Dangmei & Singh, 2016) describe Generation Z as the most demanding, acquisitive, materialistic, and entitled generation to date. They are impatient, immediately minded, lack the ambition of prior generations, have attention deficit disorder, a high dependence on technology, and a short attention span.

There are conflicting opinions amongst scholars regarding generational differences, however, it is widely accepted that, Generation Z share qualities of millennials, although, that said they differ from millennials in many different aspects (Chilakuri, 2020).

2.3 Retention

As outlined previously in the introduction, there is currently a shortage of engineers and along with a huge demand for engineers. With the shortage coupled with the demand, it is vital that primarily engineering organisations take a closer look at retention and their retention strategies. Bussin (2018), defines retention as a process which employees are encouraged to remain with an organisation for as long as possible. According to research, employees frequently quit a company for reasons like conflict with co-workers, inadequate pay, a lack of professional advancement, a lack of drive, obligations to family, and a lack of employee engagement.

Talent Management when helps ensure that organisations have the right talents, the right people at the right time. Talent Management is crucial to ensure that organisations such as ESB achieve their strategic objectives (Taylor, 2014). Retention are important aspects of talent management. Recruitment refers to attracting and selecting individuals into a job role. Recruiting the right individuals is vital to for organisation's to ensure that they have the right people at the right time in order to deliver their strategy successfully. (CIPD, 2021)

Over the years, employees' reasons for deciding to remain with a company for a significant amount of time have changed. As culture and worker demands change, so do the expectations and preferences of employees and potential employees La(nier, 2017). Employee turnover can have quite a significant negative impact on an organisation, it is particularly costly for organisations. Studies relating to Generation Z turnover are quite limited, as they have only been active in the workplace for a short period of time.

Sidorcuka and Chesnovicka (2017) in (PRUND, 2021), suggest that, nowadays, employee retention is becoming more difficult due to the diversity of candidates and also because of the multiple existing methods of attraction, recruitment, retention that competitors can use. According to (Lyons, et al., 2012), businesses should focus their efforts on retaining employees, especially those between the ages of 20 and 24, as well as 30 and 34. Instead of assuming these individuals are pursuing long-term endeavours with an organisation, employers should see these age groups as "high risk" and alter engagement and satisfaction initiatives as such to prevent turnover and maximize productivity.

Also, with the current phenomenon of the Great Resignation, which saw a record of four million workers leave their jobs in April alone, it is important now more than ever for HR professionals to understand how best to retain Generation Z employees (Corbett, 2021).

2.4 Generation Z: Career Progression

Career Progression has been identified as pertinent factor which influences retention, according to CIPD (2020), it is critical to create an environment which promotes an environment where the growth of its individuals as leaders is supported and an environment where senior leaders lead by example. Career development and progression are vital in terms of employee engagement and retention, for these reasons career development should interwoven with the objectives of the business. For Generation Z, there has been a significant amount of research which indicates that career progression has a huge influence on generation Z employees when it comes to not only

selecting a job with an organisation but also the decision to remain with an organisation. Iorgulescu (2016) in (Barhate & Dirani, 2022) identified that nearly all Generation Z individuals regarded career advancement within an organisation as their top priority. Generation Z has a powerful desire to grow their career, Bohdziewicz (2016) discovered that Generation Z perceive that career growth is achieved through acquiring professional competencies. Generation Z are determined to fully develop their potential and grow professionally by learning professional competencies within the workplace. Bohdziewicz (2016) found that the Generation Z cohort would rather achieve lateral growth within an organisation than hierarchical growth within an organisation. Generation Z are determined to fully develop their potential and grow professionally by learning professional competencies within the workplace. General managerial competence was ranked lowly by Generation Z in Bohdziewicz (2016) study with a high rejection rate of approximately 90%, indicating that Generation Z have very little interest in managerial and decision making roles. Although, (Pearson, 2018) found that Generation Z's main goal is to become top leaders in their profession.

Further to this, studies revealed that Generation Z look for companies that promote career development in the medium term as well as greater flexibility and accessibility within the workplace. Organisations often fail to clarify what career development looks like in the medium term, the Generation Z cohort will not hesitate to leave or reject a job proposal when they feel that the development of their career is not anticipated or considered. Generation Z anticipates rapid career growth and therefore anticipate expectations of promotions with a selected job (Pauli, et al., 2021). Additionally, Grow and Yang (2019) in (Barhate & Dirani, 2022) identified that Generation Z indicated their desires to start their own families by age 33 and want to have a settled career to support their future family. This further indicates Generation Z's desire to achieve rapid career growth.

Knowing that career progression is a vital motivating factor for the Generation Z cohort and that they are likely to leave a job when they feel as though their career development expectations are not being met, it is important to discuss the 'Job Hopping' phenomenon. When an employee leaves a job within 2 years this is referred to as 'job hopping'. Job hopping was identified as a challenge by Naim & Lenka (2017) with employers struggling to retain talented employees due to job hopping. Although job hopping has been typically identified as a challenge associated with millennials, with research conducted by Gallup (2016) indicating that only 50% of millennial employees remained with their current employer throughout 2017, the other 50% leaving and taking their skills and experience elsewhere. A recent survey

conducted by Deloitte (2021) found that 53% of Gen Z's would welcome a change within two years if they were given the opportunity. Along with this it found that only 21% of Gen Z's would prefer to stay with the same company for 5 years. This would indicate that like the millennial cohort, job hopping could be a potential challenge also associated with the Generation Z cohort. Further supporting this, Du Plessis 2015 in Latukha, et al. (2022) found that millennial employees and Generation Z employees were less likely to continuously work within the same organisation. Although this looks like it could be a potential challenge in terms of retention for organisations, there is far more research which indicates that with the right attitude to career progression, generation z are likely to remain with a company. Iorgulescu (2016) in Barhate & Dirani, (2022) states the opportunity for growth within an organisation encourages loyalty towards that organisation.

2.5 Generation Z: Learning and Development

Bussin (2018) indicates that the retention of top employees can be supported by providing learning and development opportunities, it is evident that learning and development influences retention within an organisation. Existing literature also identified learning and development as a key area of interest for Generation Z employees. It has been found that 76% of Generation Z believe that learning is the key to their career advancement (Perna, 2021). Research conducted by Costen and Salazar (2011) indicated that employees who are given a chance to acquire new skills through training and development feel that they are more satisfied with their jobs and are more likely to be loyal to the company. Continuous learning has been identified as a motivating factor by Generation Z. According to Merat et al. (2018) in Fratričová & Kirchmayer (2018), it was discovered that, Generation Z are deciding on their prospective employers based on the opportunities available for learning and development, trust, and job security. In a study of Generation Z employees by (x), opportunities for training and skill development are crucial, they have been identified as major priorities for Generation Z employees when not only selecting an employer but also deciding to remain with an employer.

Generation Z are eager to learn, be quick and efficient, they will change job easily if they feel that it does not meet their expectations. For this reason, it is important to examine the preferred learning styles of Generation Z employees to provide such learning opportunities

that are adapt to them. In a study conducted by (Chillakuri, 2020) it discovered that Generation Z prefer self-directed, independent learning using technology and they expect organisations to be committed to keeping them up to date in terms of their skills and digital advances.

In a study of Generation Z students, it identified that there is a need for educational environments and programmes to be updated in reaction to the various demands of newer generations. Generation Z and millennials are both technology orientated, there is more of a demand for interactive and technology-based learning in comparison to previous generations. (DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020)

According to Shorey, et al. (2021), Generation Z students prefer an independent learning style with less passive but more visual and kinaesthetic learning. They also crave convenience and they are open to receiving honest feedback. Generation Z have a desire to learn in an environment which allows them to participate, learn independently, take part in hands on activities and use their aural, visual, and kinaesthetic senses. This type of learning environment which Generation Z students desire is dominated heavily by technology (Shorey, et al., 2021). Further research supports this, Renfro (2015) in Wiedmor (2015), indicated that Generation Z, oppose classroom based learning, that they are driven visually by graphics, expect feedback instantly and prefer customised learning. Additionally, Bartczak & Szymankowska (2020) indicated that Generation Z prefer online learning over traditional learning.

Although, in a recent study of millennial and Generation Z students, it discovered that Generation Z students had more of a negative perception of online education than the millennial students had. Generation Z felt that online education was less engaging and they preferred face-to-face education as they perceived it to be more enjoyable and effective. (Garai-Fodor & Csercsa, 2022). Further to this, in a study of Generation Z students communication habits it found that Generation Z employees were aware that technology was having a negative impact, research suggests that the over use of technology among the younger cohort has a negative impact on critical thinking, problem solving along with deficiency in written and spoken communication. (Janssen & Carradini, 2021)

2.6 Generation Z: Work-life balance and Flexibility

Another key theme emerging from the literature is work-life balance and flexibility, according to CIPD (2021), organisations should promote flexibility where they can to improve retention. There is research which suggests that there is a positive link between work-life balance and employee engagement. Research also suggests that poor work-life balance is associated with high turnover. Jaharuddin and Zainol (2019) in (Lee, et al., 2021) determined that as employee engagement increases the tendency to leave the organisation decreases. Studies have also shown that employees who had greater flexibility and balance between home and work, were more engaged in the workplace. (Lee, et al., 2021) This is pertinent in relation to the retention of Generation Z employees as there is a lot of research that examines work-life which indicates that work-life balance is a huge factor in terms of their career goals.

In relation to Generation Z and work-life balance, even though Generation Z may have less family commitments, they still aspire to have a flexible work schedule to keep the demands of work and family life separate, to remain engaged at work. In a survey of over 400 Generation Z individuals, it was found that Generation Z's ideal career focuses on 'lifestyle' with a strong emphasis on work-life balance, followed closely by stability and security (Coogan & Crowley-Henry, 2020). Additionally, flexibility and work-life balance has become more important now more than ever, the EY Work Reimagined Employee Survey (2021) indicated that more than half of the employees surveyed from all over the world would consider resigning from their jobs if they are not afforded some flexibility in terms of where and when they work. This research suggests that Generation Z expect the ability to have flexibility now more than ever.

The workplace has rapidly evolved in the last two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant proportion of the workforce has been forced to work from home, making the line between the workplace and home more difficult to distinguish thus impacting work-life balance and well-being (Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu Burak, 2021) (Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu Burak, 2021). The Deloitte Global Millennial and Gen Z Survey (2021) indicated that roughly 40% of millennials and Gen Z's feel their employers have done a poor job of supporting their mental well-being during this period.

Although Generation Z are also known as the ‘digital natives’ as they are used to being online constantly in their personal lives, it seems as though the use of technology is impinging on work-life balance. Carradini & Janssen (2021) found that the expectation of being available professionally constantly around the clock is a significant concern for Generation Z. The use of technology professionally made them feel as though they must respond to every request instantly and that they could never “fully leave work”. Further to this, in a study of Generation Z healthcare students, it found that they relied heavily on technology in daily living, typically spending roughly nine hours a day on their electronic devices. This dependence on technology resulted in underdeveloped social skills which also placed them at risk for mental health concerns (Shorey, et al., 2021). This research displays how technology is impinging on work-life balance for Generation Z employees and the importance of addressing issues like such and addressing work life balance in the workplace. Interestingly, research has shown, that face to face interaction is the number one desired communication method by Generation Z employees.

2.7 Generation Z: Salary

Herzberg (1966) in (Taylor, 2014), described pay as a ‘hygiene’ factor, suggesting that remuneration is only something that is acted upon when it is absent, similar to the cleanliness of a house. In management terms, this would indicate that remuneration or salary has a greater ability to act as a ‘push’ factor than its ability to work as a ‘pull’ factor. Furthermore, Bussin (2018) states that remuneration alone, will not enable an effective retention strategy and suggests that remuneration is only 25% of an employee’s decision to remain with the organisation.

According to (CIPD, 2022), two-fifths of employers (41%) reported increased employee turnover or difficulty with retaining people over the last six months. To combat the challenges in retaining its employees, almost half (46%) have raised the pay of the incumbent workforce and plan to raise pay in the future.

In terms of Generation Z, salary appears to be an important factor in relation to the recruitment and retention of Generation Z employees. Mondres (2019) found that Generation Z places importance on a role that pays well (72 percent), motivates them (64 percent) and comes with good benefits (62 percent).

In a study of 327 Generation Y and Generation Z accountancy students conducted by Douglas Colauto & da Silva Sousa (2021) it was found that there were similarities between Generation Y and Generation Z's work values and that they were highly focused on financial stability. There is a substantial amount of research which indicates that Generation Z expect to obtain a high or competitive salary and that a high salary played a crucial role when selecting an employer. There have been several studies which have identified salary as a key motivator. In a study of turnover of public sector employees, it found that salary has a strong impact negatively on turnover in early in the career. Further to this it was identified that high starting salaries and rapid promotion can decrease the level of turnover and help to attain top talent Jik Cho & Lewis (2012). This research further supports that Generation Z seeks out financial stability when choosing an employer and indicates that a high salary is pertinent in correlation with both the recruitment and retention of Generation Z employees.

Financial stability appears to be particularly important to Generation Z employees it is a desire that has evolved from the economic challenges their families endured during the Recession. As well as a high salary, fringe benefits are valued to some degree by Generation Z employees. Fringe benefits such as education, grants, health insurance and retirement benefits to name a few played a part when choosing an employer. Fringe benefits such as these help to build a sense of financial stability or security. Although that said, while it was determined that fringe benefits are great motivators, they were not perceived as the most important factors.

While career progression and learning opportunities have been identified as the top motivating factor for Generation Z employees, contrary to literature which suggests throughout that Generation Z employees are similar to millennial employees in the sense that they are not motivated by salary or monetary rewards, a study of Irish Generation Z employees revealed that financial reward was a motivator in their current roles. The study also highlighted that Irish Gen Z employees were interested and confused by their employees approach to their reward management system and suggested that employers need to be precise and clear in terms of laying out salary and bonus policies. (Collins, 2020)

A study conducted by Deloitte with the Network of Executive Women, revealed that if given a choice of a monotonous job with a high salary and an interesting job with lesser pay, Generation Z were fairly split over the choice. Therefore, it's crucial to pinpoint the elements effecting Generation Z's engagement at work, so organisations can act strategically to retain Generation Z employees and their valuable skills. (Lee, et al., 2021)

2.8 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has covered Mainheim's generational theory, the characteristics of Generation Z. This chapter explored career progression, learning and development, work-life balance and salary from Generation Z perspective and their impact on the retention of Generation Z.

Chapter Three: Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

3.1 Introduction:

The previous chapter served as a review of the relevant literature and an outline of recent research on the topic. This chapter will discuss the rationale for this research and outline the research aims and objectives which have been derived from the literature.

3.2 Rationale for Research

Whilst there has been some research conducted on Generation Z in the workplace in general, there has been a distinct lack of research conducted on the recruitment and retention of Generation Z engineers in the energy sector.

The number of Generation Z employees in the workplace and entering the workplace is increasing rapidly. ESB has struggled with the recruitment and retention of engineering employees in particular. With ESB's Net Zero by 2040 strategy, it is important now more than ever for HR professionals in ESB to understand how to recruit and retain Generation Z engineers in the most effective way.

3.3 Research aims and objectives

The researcher sets out to explore:

“A qualitative investigation of retention of Generation Z Engineers in the Electricity Supply Board (ESB)”

This research is being undertaken to gain an in depth understanding of the factors influencing the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB. Previously, the literature identified career progression, learning and development, work-life balance and salary as key factors pertaining to the retention of Generation Z employees. This research will focus on the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z engineers in ESB towards career progression, their specific learning and development expectations, work-life balance and salary. Through gaining an in-depth understanding of Generation Z engineers attitudes and behaviours towards career progression, their specific learning and development expectations, work-life balance and salary in terms of retention, the findings of this research can then be used to implement effective retention strategies for Generation Z engineers in ESB.

This study will explore, assess and interrogate the complexities and ramifications relating to the factors influencing the retention of Generation Z Engineers by employing the following sub questions:

1. What is Generation Z engineers’ expectations in terms of Career Progression?
2. What is Generation Z’s preferred learning and development style/approach in the workplace?
3. What is Generation Z engineers’ perception of work-life balance?
4. How much influence does salary have on the retention of Generation Z engineers?

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter will discuss the research paradigm and explain the reasons behind the researchers chosen methodology. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were considered. After consideration a qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate methodology. This chapter covers the research philosophy, research approach, research

participants, the research procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations in more detail. Limitations of the study will also be discussed.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the system of assumptions and beliefs regarding the enhancement of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Regardless if the researcher is aware or not, the researcher will make a number of type of assumptions. According to Saunders et al (2019), these assumptions include, ontological assumptions which relate to the assumptions about the realities you encounter in your research, epistemological assumptions which relates to human knowledge and axiological assumptions which refers to the extent and ways our own values impact the research process.

There are five leading research approaches in management and business which include but are not limited to; critical realism, positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism and postmodernism. (Saunders, et al., 2019). Saunders, et al., (2015) describes positivism as a technique used to obtain organised, clean data from a large population. Interpretivism indicates that all knowledge is a matter of interpretation. Related to constructionism, rather than being determined by hypothesis and aims, the information gathered is socially constructed (Quinlan, et al., 2019).

As the aim of this study is exploratory, concepts such as attitudes and expectations towards career progression, learning and development, work-life balance and salary are subjective an interpretivist approach was adopted. Furthermore, according to (Saunders, et al., 2019), interpretivism is a superior method for exploratory studies because it focuses on narratives, viewpoints, and interpretations, it is inductive, uses small samples, and consists of in-depth investigations using qualitative methodologies. therefore a positivist approach would not be suitable.

4.3 Research Approach and Research Methods

The research approach is influenced by the underlying area of the research and the chosen philosophy discussed previously.

The second layer of Saunders et al research onion is the research approach (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015). It classifies research approach into two categories: deductive and inductive. The deductive technique focuses on using the research to establish theories and concepts that will be tested using data by the researcher. The inductive approach, on the other hand, entails gathering data and formulating a hypothesis based on the findings of data analysis (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015).

The research will adopt an inductive approach, Saunders et al. (2012) states, context is essential in inductive logic. It is appropriate for small sample sizes and are better suited in case study research.

An inductive approach is required for developing theory and seeks to provide plausible meanings for the perceptions the behaviours observed. Additionally, inductive research allows for researcher participation during the investigation process, which is beneficial in this study as the researcher is familiar with ESB (Quinlan, 2011).

After careful consideration, the researcher chose to adopt qualitative research after analysing both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Quinlan (2019) identifies quantitative research as deductive, objectivist and usually placed in the positivist paradigm. Quantitative research focuses on the gathering of numerical data or data that can be coded numerically. It is often used in descriptive and casual research design. Quantitative research was not appropriate in this instance as the researcher was required to explore the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z engineers towards the factors influencing retention among this cohort in order to gain a comprehensive understanding. Quantitative research does not allow for the in-depth volume of information which qualitative research offers.

Qualitative research focuses on a more exploratory research design, dealing with human experience and more in-depth ideas (non-numerical data). With an inductive approach, qualitative research is conducted (Saunders, et al., 2019). (Anderson, 2009) discussed the benefits of qualitative data when HR research focuses on addressing organisational challenges.

Therefore, an inductive approach has been adopted for this research. An inductive approach, carrying out qualitative research was chosen to acquire an in depth, comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the retention of Generation Z engineers and to uncover how ESB can modify its retention strategies to retain Generation Z engineers. A quantitative approach was not selected as the research intended to

4.4 Data Collection

Semi structured interviews were identified as the most appropriate method of data collection in order to gain rich data. Although interviews are time consuming, interviews can help the researcher collect data that is valid and accurate which is relevant to the chosen research topic and objectives (Saunders, et al., 2015). semi structured interviews allow for further exploration of each answer as appropriate. Surveys require a large sample and provide short responses with minimal detail, surveys would not have been an appropriate research method in this instance as the researcher would not have been able to gather rich data that provided an in-depth insight into the factors influencing the retention of Generation Z engineers. The literature review evoked a number of themes and issues which the interview questions were derived from. Open ended interview questions were composed in order to allow the participants to share their personal experiences and opinions, enabling them to express themselves freely. Interviews were scheduled for one hour in duration, however interviews lasted anywhere between 20-50 minutes in duration. Some interviewees were more willing to share their experiences than others, some were reluctant to share their experience, this is a disadvantage of conducting interviews. Throughout the interviews, the researcher was improving their interview skills and was able to evoke more rich data as the process went on.

4.5 Research Participants

A small sample size is recommended when considering an interpretivist approach. For the purpose of this research, the researcher adopted a purposeful judgement sample approach. It was vital that the research sample were a part of the Generation Z cohort and also that they were engineers working in the energy sector. Generation Z Engineers participating on the ESB Graduate Programme were targeted, engineers from all disciplines including; electrical, mechanical and civil were targeted.

Participant	Age	Gender	Engineering Discipline
P1	25	Female	Civil

P2	25	Female	Electrical
P3	25	Female	Mechanical
P4	24	Male	Electrical
P5	25	Male	Civil
P6	25	Female	Civil
P7	25	Male	Mechanical
P8	25	Female	Civil
P9	24	Male	Electrical
P10	24	Female	Civil

4.6 Research Procedure

As discussed previously in more detail, the researcher chose to conduct semi structured interviews to allow further exploration of each answer as appropriate. The questions were prepared based on the themes derived from the literature. Ten semi structured interviews were completed over Microsoft teams, they were recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were contacted via email for participation consent. Following the researcher confirming the list of participants who agreed to take part in the study, each participant was sent an email with an information sheet, see Appendix A, explaining the research topic and the confidentiality of the interviews. Each participant was sent a consent form prior to the commencement of interviews to review and sign, see Appendix B. The researcher informed the participants that recordings and transcripts would be kept confidential. Interviews lasted anywhere between 20-50 minutes in duration. Interviewees were advised that they could withdraw consent at any stage.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics refers to a set of standards or principles which reflect appropriate moral behaviour (Allen, 2017). Cohen (2017) indicates that researches have a duty to ensure that the dignity of the participants as human beings in research is upheld (Cohen, et al., 2017). Considering

this, throughout all aspects of the research and data collection, the National College of Ireland Ethical Guidelines and Procedures were strictly adhered to.

All participants were informed and made aware of the aims and objectives of the research study. Each participant completed a detailed consent form, consenting to participating voluntarily with the right to withdraw at any stage during the process without any penalty. Participants were advised on how their data would be stored, that it would be stored securely in a password protected folder on the laptop of the researcher for sole purpose of the research. Participants were assured that they will remain anonymous. Throughout the interview transcripts and research findings, participants were identified as P1-P7 to ensure anonymity of the participants. Interview participants were also informed that the interview transcript in which all identifying data was removed would be held for two years. Participants were notified that under the freedom of information legislation they have the right to access the information they have provided at any time.

4.8 Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out prior to interviewing the participants of the study to determine if the interview questions were clear and relevant. A pilot run can be referred to as a trial run of the research study. The researcher conducted one pilot interview, the participant was a member of the Generation Z cohort and an engineer in ESB. Following the pilot study, the researcher altered the questions to ensure that they were understood by the participants and also to eliminate repetition in the questions that were being asked. A full list of the research questions asked is demonstrated in Appendix C.

4.9 Analysis of Data

After completing the semi structured interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews to analyse the findings visually. Thematic analysis is a data analysis technique which is used to find, examine, and describe patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was then conducted, the researcher coded the notes and allocated them to the pre-identified themes in the literature review. The thematic analysis followed the six steps as detailed in (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- 1. Familiarising yourself with data*
- 2. Generalising initial codes*

3. *Searching for themes*
4. *Reviewing the themes*
5. *Defining and naming the themes*
6. *Producing the report*

The researcher identified and analysed themes relating to the factors influencing the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB. The themes identified by the researcher will be presented in more detail in the next Chapter: Research Findings and Analysis. After the findings are presented, a Discussion Chapter will follow, giving the reader an insight to the meanings behind the findings using the literature and the findings from the research.

4.10 Limitations

The primary limitation of this research is that the findings of this study cannot be generalised for all engineers. The findings of this research pertain to the experiences and expectations of Generation Z engineers working in ESB. Although, the findings of this research may be of interest to organisations that employ Generation Z engineers. Qualitative research is timely, availability and access to interviewees was a constraint..

Chapter Five: Research Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter will present the findings to the research question:

“A qualitative investigation of retention of Generation Z Engineers in the Electricity Supply Board (ESB)”

This researcher set out to explore the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z relating to the key factors influencing the retention of Generation Z Engineers in ESB. The key factors

identified were; Career Progression, Learning and Development, Work-life balance and Salary. The investigation had four objectives:

1. What are Generation Z engineers' expectations in terms of Career Progression?
2. What is Generation Z's preferred learning and development style/approach in the workplace?
3. What are Generation Z engineers' perception of work-life balance?
4. How much influence does salary have on the retention of Generation Z engineers?

5.2 Objective One: What are Generation Z engineers' expectations in terms of Career Progression?

The literature review identified Career Progression as a key factor influencing the retention of Generation Z employees. It was identified that career progression was of high importance to Generation Z. Some of the key topics discussed in the literature review that affected the retention of Generation Z were; expectations of rapid career growth and 'job hopping'. The types of desired career paths of Generation Z employees were also explored, and it was identified that Generation Z were not interested in managerial type roles.

It is crucial to understand Generation Z engineers' expectations, attitudes and behaviors pertaining to career progression as HR Professionals in order to effectively support the retention of Generation Z engineers. The first objective of the researcher was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the expectations of Generation Z Engineers in ESB in terms of career progression in order to determine the most critical expectations which are influencing retention.

5.2.1 Importance of Career Progression

A strong theme that emerged from the interviews was the value that the interviewees placed on Career Progression, the participants regarded career progression very highly, with 8 out of 10 participants noting its high importance. It was clear from the interview data that career progression was significantly important. For example, P4 commented:

“I would say that is a very important factor” and ‘you know, with time, I would like to see greater opportunities, you know, mentoring opportunities in the company, to progress along the ladder”

P5 stated:

“I had a choice between like money and the career progression, so I chose ESB for my career rather than money.”

Upon reviewing the interview data, the interview data provided mixed perceptions in terms of rapid career growth. Participants were asked how often they felt they should be promoted, varied answers were provided, For example, P3 stated:

“I'd like to be kind of progressing as fast as possible... I think in my 20s I'm looking at, I want to kind of be promoted every year.”

While P2 expressed an opposing view regarding rapid career progression:

“I wouldn't say that I would want it like quick or anything, but I would want to, like, take my time.”

Findings from this research were inconclusive in terms of Generation Z's attitude towards rapid career growth, Although (Pauli, et al., 2021) identified that Generation Z expect rapid career growth, the researcher could not determine this.

5.2.2 Job hopping:

Findings from the interviews indicated a significant theme of a lack of loyalty to organisations amongst Generation Z and presented an indication that Generation Z engineers are likely to engage in ‘job hopping’. Loyalty to the organisation was not evident during the interviews. Participants were asked how many companies they saw themselves in over the course of their career, P3 stated:

“I don't think anyone has loyalty anymore to companies...they'd say, you know, when you got a job with ESB, it's a job for life and I don't think that's the case anymore.”

Furthermore, P6 commented:

“You can't work for the same company for your whole career. It's just you need to get experience everywhere.”

Job hopping was a key theme that emerged from the literature. The literature illustrated conflicting views regarding job hopping, some research indicated that job hopping would be an issue while some literature indicated that Generation Z are more loyal than their predecessors to organisations. Previously Iorgulescu (2016) in (Barhate & Dirani, 2022) identified that Generation Z are more inclined to be loyal to their organisations once they are provided with the right career opportunities, findings from this research contradict this,

5.2.3 Leadership/ Managerial type roles

Findings from the research provide both corresponding and conflicting elements to findings of the literature review. A strong theme emerged from the interview data, indicating that Generation Z engineers in ESB want to be future leaders. Most of the participants indicated an interest in leadership or managerial type roles.

“So I would like to see myself mentoring or team of engineers.”

This instead supports, Pearson (2018) study which discovered that Generation Z's main goal is to become future leaders in their profession. However it contradicts Bohdziewicz (2016) findings, indicating that Generation Z have very little interest in leadership and managerial and decision making roles. In fact, only one participant was hesitant towards managerial type roles, P1 stated:

“Yeah, I would, yeah, I'll sometimes I see the managers here and they are under fierce pressure and I'm like, ohh, do I want that or am I happy just to work away?”

All of the remaining participants expressed some level of interest in managerial/leadership type roles.

However, there were perspectives which supported Bohdziewicz (2016) view that Generation Z are more concerned with developing their potential and growing professionally by achieving professional competence. Many of the participants were keen to become experts in

their profession and take a more specialised career path. When asked about how they felt about managerial or leadership type roles P3 indicated,

“I would like more technical roles and maybe to become more of a specialist”

Additionally, P6 identified with an interest in management

“I don't mind managing people I quite like people”

However P6 indicated that they would prefer a specialist type role.

“I'd rather progress in the specialist direction rather than the management direction.”

5.2.4 Travel:

Upon reviewing the interview data, travel was a strong theme that emerged that the researcher had not previously identified. Most of the participants were extremely keen to go off travelling. P1 commented:

“I know that I'd like to go traveling.”

Furthermore, P3 commented:

“I think like I would love to go abroad.”

Participants also suggested that travel would be an issue for HR in terms of retaining Generation Z engineers, P5 stated:

“I feel it's difficult for them to retain grads because like everyone does, just want to go and travel the world and gain experience in different places”

Findings from this research may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the participants lack of ability to travel due to travel restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic for two years, as a result, it is possible that there may be an upcoming resurgence in travel due to this which could potentially cause substantial implications for the retention of Generation Z engineers amongst HR professionals in ESB.

5.3 Objective Two - What is Generation Z's expectations preferred learning and development style/approach in the workplace?

Learning and Development was identified as a key factor influencing the retention of Generation Z employees in the literature review. Career Progression has been identified as a strong motivating factor influencing retention, it was identified in the literature review that Generation Z perceive learning and development as key to achieving career progression. The literature review identified that Generation Z are eager to learn. The literature review discussed the preferred learning methods of Generation Z and Generation Z's experience with online learning in particular. It is vital that HR professionals value the importance of understanding Generation Z preferred learning styles in order to best support the learning and development needs of Generation Z engineers in ESB to implement effective retention strategies. The aim of the researcher was to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning and development styles and expectations of Generation Z engineers to effectively support the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB.

5.3.1 Technical Training:

A significant theme which derived from the interview data was the desire for more structured technical training which the researcher had not previously identified. Throughout the interviews, participants demonstrated a dissatisfaction with the technical training related to the role. P1 revealed that they had received specific civil engineering training however felt it was not very applicable, stating

"I don't work with anything to do with civil at the moment. So to me it's not as applicable as it would be to some people or I wouldn't take as much from it."

Dissatisfaction was consistent with regards to technical training related to the role throughout the interviews. P5 commented

"I would be looking forward for some technical trainings as well in the future, but sadly they don't have anything in place for now"

Furthermore, P9 recognised that there was a lot of training available, however expressed,

"I know there's lots of training given to us, but sometimes It's not necessarily helping with the current role, but it might in like a few years or so."

P6 also indicated a desire to have more technical training across multiple areas or disciplines,

“Sometimes like the electrical stuff, I'd have no idea of, and the same with some of the mechanical stuff, so even just having like base understanding of it.”

The findings of this research regarding Generation Z engineers yearning for more technical training is of significant importance. ESB’s approach to learning and development policies and procedures on the ESB Engineering Graduate Development Programme may be implicated as a result of these findings.

5.3.2 Online learning:

Two strong sub-themes emerged from the research findings regarding online learning; the participants really valued the flexibility of online learning, however another strong theme which emerged from the interviews was the difficulty to engage effectively with online learning.

5.3.2.1 Online learning: Flexibility:

Another strong theme which emerged from the interview was the flexibility of online learning was very valuable to Generation Z. Throughout the interviews the participants referred to the convenience/flexibility of online learning in a positive light. For example, P4 is not based in Dublin and commented,

“if it wasn't for the online learning, it would have been probably the day travel up to Dublin for each of those... it would have been a pain to be honest”

As previously mentioned interviewees were asked how they felt about online learning, when asked P3 expressed how it was beneficial to have information readily available

“I like the way if it's online, it's recorded and I can go back and read through things again.”

Findings from this research support (Shorey, et al., 2021) findings that Generation Z have an independent learning style and long for convenience when it comes to learning.

5.3.2.2 Online Learning: Engagement:

There was an overwhelming view from the participants that online learning was not as engaging as classroom based learning. For example, interviewees were asked about how they felt about online learning, P4 commented,

“I think when you do a full day, it's tough to concentrate for a full day.”

P6 also spoke about the difficulty to engage with online learning, commenting

“it’s so easy to not pay attention”

The findings from this research are aligned with Garai-Fodor & Csercsa, (2022) study of Generation Z’s experience with online education, findings from this study indicated that Generation Z’s found online education to be less engaging than in person.

Additionally, participants referred to the difficulty to engage in technical trainings online for a full day. For example, P2 felt online learning was not appropriate for technical training, commenting

“I think to learn the technology you have to be on site”

Findings from this research further supports Shorey, et al., (2021) observations that Generation Z are keen to learn in an environment which allows them to participate, learn independently, take part in hands on activities and use their aural, visual, and kinaesthetic senses.

5.4 Objective Three: Work-Life Balance: What are Generation Z engineers expectations in terms of work-life balance?

Work-life balance was identified as a significant factor affecting the retention of Generation Z in the literature review. The literature review discussed the importance of work-life balance to Generation Z. The impact technology has on work-life balance was explored in the literature review and the impact of poor work-life balance on retention of Generation Z. The aim of the researcher was to determine the importance of work-life balance to Generation Z engineers and to understand what impact technology has on the work-life balance of Generation Z engineers in ESB.

5.4.1 Importance of Work-life Balance

A major finding from this research was the importance of work-life balance to Generation Z engineers. Work-life balance was an extremely high motivating factor which was evident throughout all of the interviews. Work-life balance was not only a strong motivating factor to join the company but also for remaining with the company. All of the 10 participants were satisfied with their work-life balance and some referred to it as a priority. For example, P4 expressed that work-life balance attracted him most to ESB

“it just looked like there was good work life balance”

P7 also conveyed the importance of work life balance as the most important factor, commenting

“For me it's, work life balance. Essentially the job that enables work life balance”. P1 also referred to work-life balance as “probably the most important”

Findings from this research correlate with Coogan & Crowley-Henry (2020), that Generation Z's ideal career has a strong focus on 'lifestyle' with a significant emphasis on work-life balance.

5.4.2 Technology

Carradini & Janssen (2021) identified that technology was impinging on work life balance for Generation Z employees, indicating that many Generation Z employees felt the need to always be available professionally. A key theme which emerged from the interview data Most of the participants were satisfied with work–life balance, 8 out of 10 participants expressed their satisfaction with work-life balance in ESB and did not feel compelled to be available professionally around the clock regardless of the instant access to technology. P3 stated,

“It's not expected of me, it's probably just habit for me that I just be checking phones and stuff all the time.”

P4 supported this view, adding,

“I wouldn't feel obliged to message someone if they were messaging me 8 or 9 at night.”

Out of 10 interviewees only 2 participants associated a negative impact with technology on their work-life balance.

Analysis of this data would indicate that contrary to the literature, where Carradini & Janssen (2021) identified technology as a factor that impedes work-life balance, it was not an issue for Generation Z Engineers in ESB. However, it is important to note, a limitation of this study is that this can not be generalised for all Generation Z engineers and that the findings of this research is specific to Generation Z engineers in ESB.

5.4.3 Networking:

A central theme which arose from the interview data was the lack of networking opportunities available and the lack of social aspect of work as a result working remotely. Most of the participants noted a lack of opportunity to connect and socialise. P1 commented:

“more social things I think would be good for everyone.”

Furthermore, P3 commented:

“I might be able to kind of, step up a little bit faster. If I had more network networking done.”

Findings from this research indicated a desire to network and socialise amongst the Generation Z engineering cohort. However it’s important to note that COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed around socialising may have impacted this. It’s also important to note, in critical parts of the business such as Aghada Power station, COVID-19 social distance procedures are still in place.

5.5 Objective Four: Salary

The literature review identified salary as a key factor affecting the retention of Generation Z employees. The literature review discussed topics affecting retention of Generation Z engineers relating to salary; financial security and job security were identified as major concerns for Generation Z employees, having a significant impact on retention. The importance of communicating a transparent reward system was also identified as a key factor influencing retention. The aim of the fourth objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z engineers in ESB attitudes and behavior towards salary in terms of retention. The researched set out to determine the importance of job security and financial security in terms of retention of Generation Z Engineers on ESB.

5.5.1 Job Security vs Financial Security

The researcher set out to uncover which held more importance to Generation Z, financial security or job security. Financial security and job security were previously identified in the literature as high motivating factors. Upon reviewing the interview data there were conflicting opinions regarding the importance of financial security and job security. For example, P4 indicated,

“More money is probably more important to the me than the security, especially at the moment when I know there's loads of jobs everywhere.”

While P3 held little importance on either job security or financial security,

“Right now I don't care so much about money or job stability really, I'm kind of just looking for experience at the moment”

Findings from this research were inconclusive, there were various opinions amongst the participants and as a result the researcher could not determine which held more importance, job security or financial security.

5.5.2 Salary as a motivating factor:

A central theme which emerged from the interviews was salary was a significant motivating factor but not the sole motivating factor in relation to retention of Generation Z engineers. Nine out of ten participants indicated that they would consider leaving ESB for a higher salary, however while the participants all indicated that they would consider leaving ESB for a higher salary, it was not the sole motivator. For example, when asked if salary was a motivating factor, P6 expressed

“I'm staying more so because of the whole vision of the company of sustainability and renewable energy.”

Participants were also asked how could HR retain Generation Z engineers and P7 commented,

” In terms of keeping the engineers its keeping them with money, keeping them with interesting jobs and keeping them in areas they actually like to work”

Findings from this research support Bussin (2018)’s claims that salary is not the sole motivating factor in an employee’s decision to remain with an organisation.

5.5.3 Reward System

After examining the interview data, it was very clear that there was distinct pattern of confusion amongst all of the interviewees regarding the reward system. For example, interviewees were asked, how if the reward system met their expectations and P1 commented, *“I don't really know about reward system, so I'd say no”*. Furthermore P2 commented *“I'm not very clear because I'm not really sure about the reward system here”*. As well as the lack of clarity on the reward system there was a theme of frustration with the reward system.

Previously, Adecco (2015), identified the importance of employers being transparent with Generation Z in terms of policies and procedures regarding reward systems and salaries.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction:

This chapter will provide context to the main findings from the qualitative interview data presented in the previous chapter, with the goal of delving further into the meanings behind the results and any potential future implications they might have.

6.2 Objective One Discussion: What are Generation Z engineers' expectations in terms of Career Progression?

The first objective of the researcher was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the expectations of Generation Z Engineers in ESB in terms of career progression and examine the value Generation Z engineers in ESB place on career progression in order to determine the most critical expectations which are influencing retention.

The literature review identified career progression as a significant motivating factor for Generation Z. Iorgulescu (2016) in (Barhate & Dirani, 2022) suggest that Generation Z regard career progression as a top priority. In addition to this, (Pauli, et al., 2021), proposed that Generation Z always have progression on their mind, looking at companies with progression in the medium-term and anticipating rapid career growth. Findings from this research align heavily, Generation Z engineers regard career progression very highly in terms of its importance. Based on these research findings, it is However, in terms of rapid career growth, findings from the research were inconclusive. There was no strong pattern which illustrated a strong lust for rapid career growth. Although, it's important to note all of the participants are employed on the ESB Engineering Graduate Development Programme, as part of the Engineering Graduate Programme, graduates rotate into various entry level engineering roles, perhaps for this reason, the expectation of rapid career growth did not emerge as they will not be progressing for at least 3 years. Although Generation Z engineers were evidently concerned with career progression, it could not be determined if they were eager to progress their careers rapidly. Further research on this topic to explore Generation Z expectations in terms of rapid career growth would benefit HR professionals greatly, by having a comprehensive understanding of this expectation would allow HR professionals to implement career paths tailored to Generation Z's expectations in order to support retention.

The findings from this research illustrate both corresponding and conflicting elements to the findings discussed in the literature review. The literature review discussed Bohdziewicz (2016) findings in a study of Generation Z employees that identified that Generation Z have

little interest in managerial roles, indicating that they would instead, prefer to progress laterally and be professionally competent. However, Pearson (2018) illustrated Generation Z's desire to be future leaders in their profession. Findings of this research, partly support Bodhziewicz (2016) claims, Generation Z Engineers in ESB were inclined to choose a specialist career path over a managerial career path, however nine out of ten participants did indicate an interest in managerial or leadership type roles, supporting Pearson (2018)'s findings, contrary to Bohdziewics findings that Generation Z had very little interest in managerial type roles.

The literature review identified that Generation Z have more loyalty to their predecessors; millennials. However findings from this research don't correlate with this, Generation Z engineers are eager to gain experience and develop their technical expertise in different areas and in various organisations. Based on these findings, it appears that 'job hopping' will likely be a challenge for the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB. As well as this, an interesting topic that also emerged from the interview data was travel, Generation Z engineers were keen to travel. Learnings from this study indicate that after COVID-19, Generation Z engineers are eager to travel the world. However, all of the participants are employed on a three year fixed-term contract, while the participants are likely to be made permanent at the end of their contract, perhaps Generation Z engineers on a permanent contract may be less inclined to be concerned with travelling, this could be a potential area for further research. Albeit, it is pertinent that HR professionals consider the implications of travel and review their policies regarding career breaks and opportunities to work abroad to support the retention of Generation Z. While this research is limited to Generation Z engineers in ESB, findings from this research may be of interest to other engineering organisations.

6.3 Objective Two Discussion: What is Generation Z's expectations or preferred learning and development style/approach in the workplace?

The aim of the researcher was to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning and development styles and expectations of Generation Z engineers to effectively support the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB.

The literature identified learning and development as a key motivating factor in terms of retention. The participants indicated that learning and development was quite important and regarded it highly

in line with findings of the literature. Thus, it is critical that HR professionals review their learning and development strategy to aid the retention of Generation Z engineers.

Throughout the literature review, it discussed Generation Z's desire for a learning environment which is dominated heavily by technology (Shorey, et al., 2021). However, findings from this research, do not support the intense amount of literature which suggests online learning as the preferred method of learning. Generation Z engineering interviewees indicated a blended learning style as their preference, including some online learning but not dominated heavily by technology as the literature would suggest. From the review of literature, it discovered that Generation Z perceive online learning less engaging than face-to-face learning (Garai-Fodor & Csercsa, 2022), which the findings of this research correlate heavily with. Based on these findings, it is pertinent that HR professional in ESB review their current learning and development strategy and incorporate the preferred learning approach of its employee to successfully train and retain talented employees.

A pivotal theme which emerged was a strong desire for more structured technical training related to the role. As well as this, a strong theme emerged from the interviewees for a desire for technical training within all of the engineering disciplines regardless of the engineering discipline that the interviewee was employed in. Upon reviewing the interview data, there was a strong level of dissatisfaction regarding the technical training that had been received by Generation Z engineers thus far. ESB's strategic goal is to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions by 2040, ESB's engineering employees will play a pivotal role in achieving this go and it is critical that ESB ensures that they not only have enough engineers employed to achieve this but that they have fully competent engineers in place. It is absolutely crucial that HR professional in ESB consider this and review its learning and development strategy to ensure that its Generation Z engineers are receiving frequent and effective structured technical training.

6.4 Objective Three Discussion: What are Generation Z engineers' perception of work-life balance?

The aim of this objective was to gain an understanding of Generation Z engineers' perspective of work-life balance and to determine the value they place on work-life balance. The theme of the impact of technology on work-life balance emerged in the literature review and as a result,

another aim of the researcher was determining the impact technology had on work-life balance for Generation Z engineers.

The findings of this study principally aligned with previous literature on the value of work-life balance in terms of retention of Generation Z. Through the literature review it is apparent that work-life balance is an extremely crucial motivating factor for Generation Z. (Coogan & Crowley-Henry, 2020) suggested Generation Z's ideal career focuses on 'lifestyle' with a strong emphasis on work-life balance. Findings from this research support the literature immensely. Interviewees expressed the importance of work-life balance throughout, not only in terms of deciding to remain with an organisation but also when selecting an organisation, work-life balance was the primary concern of participants. Based on these findings, it is critical that HR professionals have great consideration for work-life balance, HR should continue to focus heavily on work-life balance in terms of their retention strategies. While work-life balance has significant impact on retention it also emerged that A review of the literature identified that technology affected work-life balance negatively. However, findings from this research do not support Carradini & Janssen (2021) findings, that the use of technology professionally made Generation Z feel as though they must respond to every request instantly and that they could never "fully leave work". Furthermore Shorey, et al. (2021) indicated mental health concerns arose due to the heavy use of technology, impinging work-life balance, additionally The Deloitte Global Millennial and Gen Z Survey (2021) discovered roughly 40% of millennials and Gen Z's feel their employers have done a poor job of supporting their mental well-being. Contrary to the literature, a strong theme of satisfaction emerged regarding work-life balance and technology. Generation Z engineers viewed the impact of technology on work-life balance in a very positive light. It was evident from the research, that Generation Z engineers in ESB felt that the organisation had done a sufficient job of executing work-life balance for its employees. It's important to note, that findings regarding the satisfaction regarding work-life balance among Generation Z engineers is limited to Generation Z engineers employed by ESB and not all Generation Z engineers.

6.5 Objective Four Discussion: How much influence does salary have on the retention of Generation Z engineers?

The literature review identified salary as a key factor affecting the retention of Generation Z employees. The aim of the fourth objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of Generation

Z engineers in ESB attitudes and behavior towards salary in terms of retention. The researched set out to determine the importance of job security and financial security in terms of retention of Generation Z Engineers on ESB.

The findings from this research present both correlating and conflicting elements to the findings outlined in the literature review. Throughout the literature review it is evident that it is difficult to determine the motivation behind salary and how much importance it holds. The literature review discussed, Herzberg (1966) in Taylor (2014) theory which, described salary acting more effectively as a 'push' factor rather than its ability to work as a 'pull' factor. Findings from this research correlate with Herzberg (1966) claims. The research highlighted how Generation Z engineers are not only concern with salary, both in terms of being attracted to an organisation but to also remain with a company.

An interesting area of potential further research was strong theme emerged with regard to the type of work, interviewees expressed the desire for interesting, meaningful and valuable work to their field as well as a competitive salary. Many of the interviews expressed the importance they felt to make a difference, this was conveyed in both terms of attraction to ESB and deciding to remain with ESB. Interviewees were asked if they would consider leaving ESB for a higher salary, many expressed that they had joined ESB to make a difference to the planet, they were concerned with this and that it would depend on various factors not only salary. Based on the findings of this research, further research into the correlation between Corporate Social responsibility and its influence on retention is required. Although salary was not the sole motivating factor of Generation Z engineers and potential for further research has been identified, findings from this research clearly indicated that salary is a significant concern for retention. This supports Jik Cho & Lewis (2012), findings in their study of turnover of public sector employees, which discover salary has a strong impact negatively on turnover in early in the career. Jik Cho & Lewis (2012), findings were also based on public sector employees, this holds significant value to ESB. Based on the findings of this research, the shortage of engineers in the current market, along with a huge demand for engineers and increasing salaries with Engineers Ireland (2022) reporting that more than two-thirds of engineers with 3-5 years' experience received a pay increase of more than 5% in the past year, this is likely to have great implications for HR professionals retaining Generation Z engineers not only in ESB but all organisations that employ Generation Z engineers.

The impact and influence of CSR in terms of retention and attraction in terms of attraction and retention of Generation Z engineers for ESB

The significance of salary was overall difficult to determine. Findings from this research were inconclusive in terms of the importance of financial security and job security. The researcher could not determine exactly how much importance financial security held.

Findings from this research conveyed similar difficulties to findings from the Deloitte with the Network of Executive Women, which revealed Generation Z were fairly split over the choice of a monotonous job with a high salary or an interesting job with lesser pay.

Interviewees referred to the current market trends and the financial state of the country. With the cost of living rising as a result of the Ukraine war and a potential recession looming, this could have an impact on the findings.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

To conclude the research study, in this chapter, the researcher will review the initial research questions presented in the study and produce the primary findings of the study. To evaluate the study conducted by both prior authors and this researcher, suggestions for future research will also be given.

7.1 Research Question Revisited:

This researcher set out to explore the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z relating to the key factors influencing the retention of Generation Z Engineers in ESB. The key factors identified were; Career Progression, Learning and Development, Work-life balance and Salary. The investigation had four objectives:

1. What are Generation Z engineers' expectations in terms of Career Progression?
2. What is Generation Z's preferred learning and development style/approach in the workplace?
3. What is Generation Z engineers' perception of work-life balance?
4. How much does salary influence the retention of Generation Z engineers?

7.2 Key Findings: Career Progression

The researcher set out to develop a comprehensive understanding of the expectations of Generation Z Engineers in ESB in terms of career progression to determine the most critical expectations which are influencing retention. Correlating with the literature, key findings from the research indicated that Generation Z Engineers are extremely concerned with career

progression and regard career progression as particularly important. Findings from this study indicated that Generation Z engineers would consider leaving the company if they were not provided with opportunities to progress their career. It is clear from this, that career progression influences the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB. Although Generation Z engineers were evidently concerned with career progression, it could not be determined if they were eager to progress their careers rapidly. Further research on this topic to explore Generation Z expectations in terms of rapid career growth would benefit HR professionals greatly, an in-depth analysis of this would help HR professionals ensure that the right career progression opportunities are available at the right time in order to retain Generation Z employees.

While it could not be determined how quickly Generation Z expect to progress, in terms of their desired career path, overall Generation Z engineers were inclined to choose a technical expert or specialist career path. Generation Z were concerned with becoming 'experts' in their chosen field and keeping upholding their technical skills. Although that said, Generation Z engineers did indicate an interest in managerial type roles, while it was determined that Generation Z engineers in ESB had an interest in managerial type roles, It is important that HR professionals in ESB take this into consideration and identify clear career paths for this cohort, while also providing opportunities for them to develop managerial competence.

An important finding from the research that emerged surprisingly, was the influence of travel on the retention of Generation Z engineers. Generation Z engineers are eager to travel and consequently it will impact the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB. As previously mentioned, all participants were employed on a three-year fixed-term contract, this was a limitation of the study. The participants were keen once they complete the graduate programme to go travelling. Perhaps, Generation Z engineers on a permanent contract of employment may not be so keen to travel. These findings indicate that travel will have a negative influence on the retention of Generation Z engineers. Therefore, it is vital that HR consider the implications of travel and its influence on retention in their retention strategies for Generation Z engineers.

As they regard career progression as a priority indeed, it is crucial that HR professionals in ESB understand the career progression expectations of this generation and that they incorporate their expectations regarding career progression into their retention strategies to ensure they have a strategic competitive advantage over their competitors.

7.2 Key Findings: Learning and Development

The aim of the researcher was to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning and development styles and expectations of Generation Z engineers to effectively support the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB.

Key findings from this research support the literature, Generation Z engineers believe that learning and development is of significant importance and that is key to career progression, which as previously outlined was a priority for Generation Z engineers in ESB.

However, while the literature suggested that Generation Z preferred learning approach is heavily predominated by technology, findings from this research indicated that Generation Z engineers would prefer a blended approach to learning and development. A key theme which emerged from the research findings was that Generation Z felt that online learning was not as effective and as engaging as other methods of learning. Many of the interviewees referred to the difficulty to remain engaged. However, as previously mentioned the interviewees indicated that they would prefer a blended learning and development approach. Further research to indicate which trainings should be on-site, in person or online would be of huge benefit to learning and development team in ESB to adapt the learning and development strategy accordingly.

An important finding from the research that emerged was the desire for more technical training amongst Generation Z engineers in ESB. Surprisingly, it emerged from the interview data that Generation Z engineers in ESB were not satisfied with the level of technical training that they had received thus far. It was discovered from this research that Generation Z engineers in ESB, were eager to receive more structured technical training related to their role. Perhaps, the interviewees may be eager to gain other types of training that have not been disclosed during the course of this study. HR professionals in ESB would benefit from further research exploring the type of training that Generation Z engineers desire as well as the preferred delivery method of such training. Although these findings are limited to ESB, findings from this research and the potential further research stated may be of significant interest to other engineering organisations. It is pertinent that HR professionals prioritize this in terms of their learning and development strategy in order to retain Generation Z engineers.

7.3 Key Findings: Work-life balance

The aim of the researcher was to determine the importance of work-life balance to Generation Z engineers and to understand what impact technology has on the work-life balance of Generation Z engineers in ESB. Key findings from the research indicated that work-life balance was a significant priority for Generation Z engineers in ESB. Some interviewees even stated that work-life balance was their top priority at ESB. Findings from this research, in line with the literature, indicated that work-life balance was regarded as a crucial factor influencing the retention of Generation Z engineers and it was regarded as paramount in terms of their priorities. Overall, it was evident from the interviews that Generation Z engineers in ESB were satisfied with their work-life balance at ESB. Despite the indication in the literature review that technology had a negative impact on work-life balance, this was not found to be the case amongst Generation Z engineers in ESB. Again it is important to note that findings from this research are limited to ESB, Generation Z engineers in other organisations may not have the same experience with work-life balance. Although findings from this research suggest that work-life balance at ESB is strong and executed well amongst its Generation Z engineering employees, the findings still highlight the importance of work-life balance and therefore, it is pertinent that HR professionals in ESB continue to consider and review work-life balance in their retention strategies going forward as it holds extreme importance to Generation Z engineers. It's important to note that while participants were satisfied with their work-life balance at ESB, a key finding from the interviews was that participants felt that the social aspect and opportunities to network were lacking. Given that Generation Z engineers place such importance on work-life balance, it is important that HR professionals in ESB take this into consideration when developing their retention strategies and incorporate more opportunities to socialise and to network.

7.4 Key Findings: Salary

The aim of the fourth objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z engineers in ESB attitudes and behavior towards salary in terms of retention. The researcher set out to determine the importance of job security and financial security in terms of retention of Generation Z Engineers on ESB.

Findings from this research indicated that salary has a big influence on retention amongst Generation Z engineers. Although Generation Z engineers considered leaving ESB for a higher salary, they

indicated that they would not decide to leave on salary alone. However, the findings from the research heavily supported Jik Cho & Lewis (2012), claims that salary has a significant impact on retention during the early years of career and that organisations should pay attention to salary to those at the early stages of their career.

Although it is evident that salary impacts the retention of Generation Z engineers, surprisingly an important finding of this research indicated that Generation Z engineers are concerned with the type of work and the contribution that they are making, interviewees indicated that this would affect their decision to remain with an organisation. Many of the interviewees referred to their desire to make a difference to the planet. Further research to determine the influence of CSR on Generation Z decision to remain with an organisation would be of great benefit to HR professionals in ESB and may be of interest to other engineering organisations or organisations that employ a significant amount of engineers.

In relation to the importance of job security and financial security amongst Generation Z engineers in ESB, while it was evident that both held significant importance, it could not be determined which held more importance. Findings from this research were inconclusive in relation to this and are only relevant to the time that interviews took place. It is possible that the impact of COVID-19 and the potential impact of the Ukraine war could alter the findings, further research on this topic could be of potential benefit

7.5 Recommendations:

The following are the recommendations drawn from the findings of this study.

- Provide Generation Z engineers in ESB with opportunities to work abroad and offer career breaks when necessary.
- Review current Learning and Development strategy and incorporate more structured technical training related to the role.
- Review of engineering salaries against the current labour market.

7.5.1 Recommendation One: Training

Above all, HR professionals in ESB should prioritize a review of its Learning and Development strategy with Generation Z engineers in mind. The engineering capability team in ESB should liaise with the Learning and Development team and Engineers Ireland to deliver frequent structured

technical training effectively to Generation Z engineers. ESB has partnered with Engineers Ireland to provide specific technical training, however since COVID-19 all of the training has been delivered online, the delivery of its technical training should be reviewed. It is vital that ESB HR professionals prioritize technical training above all, failure to prioritize the delivery of effective technical training could result in high turnover and increase the likelihood of having incompetent engineers in the company.

7.5.2 Recommendation Two: Provide Generation Z engineers opportunities to work abroad and Career Breaks

HR professionals in ESB should be concerned about travelling when it comes to the retention of Generation Z engineers. ESB has offices worldwide including offices in the UK, Bahrain and Malta. HR professionals in ESB should take advantage of their various global offices and prioritize providing opportunities to work abroad for Generation Z engineers. As Generation Z engineers are keen to travel, providing them with opportunities to work abroad could potentially significantly reduce the level of turnover among this cohort and support the retention of Generation Z engineers. To successfully implement working abroad opportunities, ESB's engineering capability team will first need to liaise with relevant engineering managers to identify opportunities to work abroad and work closely various teams within ESB including; finance, legal and mobility. Where necessary, ESB should offer career breaks when the opportunity to work abroad does not suffice in order to retain talented Generation Z engineers.

7.5.3 Recommendation Three: Review of Engineering Salaries against the labour Market

An emerging theme that arose was the significance of salary in terms of retention, even though it wasn't the only deciding factor in an engineer's decision to leave the company, all participants still considered leaving ESB for a higher salary. ESB should involve its Reward team to review the salaries of its engineers against the current labour market and they should continue to review the salaries every six months. Salaries should be adjusted where appropriate in order to maintain a strategic approach against their competitors and to ensure their Generation Z engineers'.

7.6 Implications of Recommendations:

Considering these findings, the top priority for ESB going forward should be a review of its learning and development strategy, as this was a critical finding for the organisation in terms of retention and ensuring that they have competent engineers employed in the company in order to deliver its Net Zero by 2040 strategy successfully. A review of the learning and development strategy will not be costly as there is already an existing learning and development team. ESB is also already partnered with Engineers Ireland to provide in-company training, a review of the training provided should not be costly, however a budget of €20,000 should be set aside for additional technical training to be provided. A review of the learning and development strategy along with a review of the training being provided by Engineers Ireland will be time consuming, to review and implement effective changes, 12 months should be set aside.

Implementing opportunities to work abroad and providing career breaks to tackle retention of Generation Z engineers successfully will take a considerable amount of time, identifying opportunities and ensuring that there are no tax implications for the company. Time will be required by multiple teams in ESB to implement this recommendation. It could be quite costly, ESB HR professionals may need to consider a cost-of-living allowance to ensure that the salary of a Generation Z engineer meets the cost of living in the country that they work will potentially be working from.

A salary review every six months against the current labour market would not have any cost implications to carry out as ESB's inhouse reward can conduct this. However, if ESB's reward team decide to increase salaries it will have significant cost implications for the company. A review of salaries against the current labour market can be conducted swiftly without time implications.

If ESB consider these recommendations, they will have a strategic advantage over similar competitors in the Irish electricity market. Through implementing these recommendations and these findings from their own Generation Z engineers along with findings from the

literature review, regarding retention of Generation Z workforce. they will continue to retain their talented Generation Z workforce and deliver its Net Zero by 2040 strategy.

CIPD Personal Learning Statement

The process of completing this dissertation was rewarding and I would consider it as my most significant academic achievement. The dissertation allowed me to acquire new and valuable skills, including analytical and writing skills which I will take forward with me in my career as a HR professional.

The biggest challenged I faced, when completing this dissertation was that of finding a balance between working a full-time job and completing the dissertation. During the course of completing the dissertation my time management and organizational skills were tested.

The chosen research topic, a qualitative investigation into the retention of generation z engineers was chosen due to the relevance of my role, I have a huge interest in retention and Generation Z in particular. Through conducting the interviews, I have learned a great deal about Generation Z engineers in my organisation. I hope that findings from this research will have a positive impact on my organisations retention strategy.

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Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: Information Sheet

Dissertation Title: *A Qualitative Investigation of the Recruitment and Retention of Generation Z Engineers in the Electricity Supply Board (ESB)*

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

Who am I and what is this study about?

My name is Rachel Tracey, and I am a part-time student at National College of Ireland, completing a masters in Human Resource Management. As part of this qualification, I am required to complete a research project which will be submitted in August 2022.

For this project, I am conducting a qualitative study which will investigate the recruitment and retention of Generation Z Engineers in ESB.

What will taking part involve?

If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview which will last approximately 40 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions. Some of these questions will relate to career progression, salary, work-life balance and learning and development.

For convenience, interviews will take place over Microsoft Teams. The interview will be audio recorded and prior to the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form indicating your agreement to take part.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been selected to take part as you fall within the Generation Z age range and work for the Electricity Supply Board.

Do you have to take part?

You are not obliged to take part and your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, however, the research conducted may aid ESB in improving recruitment and retention strategies for Generation Z engineers. By participating in this research, it is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or risks.

Will taking part be confidential?

All information collected during the course of the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will be removed from the written transcripts and the written report. This will be done by removing your name and disguising any details of the interview which may act as identifying factors. When analysing and writing the findings some quotes may be included, but they will not contain any identifying information.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

Audio recordings will be used to record the interview in order to ensure accuracy in collecting the information and to allow for the data to be transcribed accurately. If requested a transcript of the interview can be provided.

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a secure, password protected folder on the researcher's computer until after the degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legalisation you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will only be submitted in my dissertation to the National College of Ireland as part of my degree.

Who should you contact for further information?

Please contact the principle researcher, Rachel Tracey at x20121121@student.ncirl.ie

Thank you.

9.2 Appendix B: Letter of Consent:

A Qualitative Investigation of the Recruitment and Retention of Generation Z Engineers in the Electricity Supply Board

Consent to take part in research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves one interview of approximately 40 minutes in duration.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation.
- I understand that original audio recordings will be recorded on Microsoft teams, they will be deleted from Microsoft Teams and will be retained securely on OneDrive until the exam boards confirms results of the dissertation.
- I understand that consent forms will be retained securely on OneDrive until the exam board confirms results of the dissertation.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for specific relevant period which will be two years from the date of the exam board.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher of this study, Rachel Tracey, to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher

Date

9.3 Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions – Topic Guide

Recruitment/Attraction:

1. Is this your first full time job since completing your degree?
2. What attracted you most to ESB as an employer?
3. Were you involved in any other recruitment processes?
4. If yes, what attracted you to those companies?
5. If yes, did you receive any other offers of employment
6. Why did you accept the offer of employment with ESB?
7. In an ideal world, what would your ideal job be? What would your ideal job provide you with?

Career Progression:

8. How important is Career Progression to you?
9. How often do you think about your career progression?
10. Do you see your career progressing in ESB or elsewhere?
11. How many companies do you see yourself working for over your lifetime?
12. How would you like your career to progress the next 5 years?
13. How do you feel about managerial/leadership type roles?
14. How often do you think you should be promoted?
15. How important would you say career advancement opportunities are to you?
16. Would you consider leaving ESB if there weren't good career advancement opportunities available at the end of the programme?
17. Would you consider leaving ESB if there weren't good career advancement opportunities available at the end of the programme?
18. What types of career advancement opportunities would you like to be available?
19. How do you feel about managerial/leadership type roles?

Learning & Development:

20. What do you expect from ESB in terms of learning and development?
21. Do you feel that your needs being met currently in terms of learning and development?
22. What type of learning and development opportunities would you like to be available to you?

23. What are your thoughts on online learning? How beneficial do you think is online learning?
24. What is your preferred learning style?
25. Are there any skills that you feel you need to develop more?
26. How do you feel about Mentoring? - How often would you like feedback?

Work-life Balance:

27. What are your current working arrangements?
28. How do you find remote working?
29. How often would you like to be in the office?
30. Is there anything you feel as though you are missing out on by not being in the office?
31. Do you miss the social aspect of being in the office?
32. What is your ideal work-life balance?
33. Do you feel that you have a good work-life balance?
34. How do you feel technology has impacted your work -life balance if at all?
35. How can ESB improve work-life balance in your opinion?

Salary:

36. How important is financial stability or job stability to you?
37. How would you rank job stability and financial stability in importance?
38. How do you feel about your current salary?
39. Is salary a strong motivating factor for you?- joining and staying
40. How do you feel about the reward system in ESB? Does it meet your expectations?
41. Would you consider leaving ESB for a higher salary?

Other:

42. What challenges do you see for HR in the retention of Generation Z engineers in ESB?
43. What more do you think ESB can do to attract Generation Z engineers?