

**WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER THE EDUCATIONAL  
PROGRESS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AT KEY STAGE 4: A  
GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH**

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## ABSTRACT

The educational attainment of Looked After Children (LAC), particularly in relation to their non-looked after peers, remain poor. The present study sought to further understand the contextual factors and individual mechanisms which act to support or hinder the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4.

The study operated within a Critical Realist approach and sought the experiences of both LAC and professionals who work to support LAC. In total, eight participants took part in the study. Semi-structured interviews were completed with two LAC participants and six professionals. Both LAC participants were 17 years old and reflected on their experiences of Key Stage 4. Professionals included Virtual School Officers (VSO), a social worker and a Designated Teacher for LAC (DT).

The current study utilised Grounded Theory Methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which allowed the researcher to develop a conceptual understanding of the observed data resulting in an overarching theoretical scheme. The researcher labelled this scheme '*Availability to Engage in Learning*' (AEL). The researcher further identified the facilitative and inhibitive contexts and mechanisms which influence AEL. These were then placed in Context Mechanism Outcome models (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to visually represent the ways in which they impact the educational progress of LAC. Finally, the implications of the findings with regards to the field of Educational Psychology are considered.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces the current study in which Looked After Children (LAC) and the professionals who support them were interviewed to further understand what factors support or impede the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4 (KS4). More importantly, through the use of a Grounded Theory methodology, this study employs a novel approach which allows the researcher to move beyond a 'description' of pupil and professional views towards a theoretical and interpretative understanding of basic social processes studied in context.

This chapter begins by providing an understanding of LAC in context before briefly discussing the relevance of completing research with LAC for the profession (educational psychology) and outlining the philosophical orientation of the study. The chapter then concludes by detailing the focus of this research.

### 1.2 PARTICIPATION OF LAC IN THIS STUDY

The current study had a specific focus on understanding what supported or inhibited educational progress at Key Stage 4. It drew on, what the researcher considered, the contemporary experiences of LAC. LAC included in the study had recently passed this phase of education i.e. Years 12 & 13 (Key Stage 5). In addition, the research drew on the experiences of key professionals who support LAC in relation to their Key Stage 4 education and included Virtual School Officers, Designated Teachers for LAC and Social workers. It is compatible with GT because GT is conceptually driven and so the inclusion of LAC and adults with various professional orientations added variation and conceptual richness within the data collected.

### 1.3 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

A Looked-After Child (LAC) is defined under section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989 (DfES, 2006) as follows:

*"...a child who is- (a) in their [Local Authority] care; or (b) provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions (in particular those under this Act)" (p.17)*

Children can become accommodated by the local authority through three main routes:

- Care orders made by the courts under section 31 of the Children Act 1989
- Voluntary accommodation arrangements under section 20 of the Children Act 1989
- Police protection or involvement with the youth justice system

In cases where a child is accommodated through a care order under section 31 the local authority assumes parental responsibility of that child. If a child is accommodated through a voluntary arrangement, the local authority does not acquire parental responsibility as these remain with the parents or other adult. However the local authority will undertake the day-to-day parental responsibilities for the child on behalf of their parents or other adult who retains parental responsibility for the child.

At present there are 68,840 LAC in England, as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 (Department for Education, 2014a), reflecting an increase of 1% on the previous figure for 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013, and an increase of 7% compared to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. The number of children becoming looked after has been steadily increasing year on year, for the last five years, and is now higher than at any point since 1985 (Department for Education, 2014a).

LAC are among society's most vulnerable children and have been shown to be at increased risk of experiencing a range of poor psychosocial outcomes (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). Children entering the care system, many from a position of social disadvantage, have often had poor pre-care experiences of education. Some of whom have experienced:

- Deprivation, neglect and/or abuse
- Difficulties with their education
- Exclusion from school
- Marginalisation, exclusion or Difficulties accessing services because of disability/communication difficulties

Pre-care experiences and characteristics, however, cannot fully account for the level of low achievement observed in the LAC population, and there is also evidence to suggest that looked-after children are at risk of being exposed to adverse experiences 'during' care (Ward, 2009) with researchers drawing our attention to the failings of the network of support available to children whilst in care. For example, Fletcher-Campbell (1998) contends that:

*"...young people are being unnecessarily and unacceptably disadvantaged by the welfare system itself, the welfare system having intervened in order to try and stem the flow of perceived disadvantage arising within the young person's domestic situation..."*

(p.4)

Literature indicates that the reasons for the low attainment of LAC are complex, do not hinge upon a single factor, and include family background, pre-care experiences, the stability and permanence of school and/or care placement, the level of planning and efficiency by professionals when implementing decisions, and poor communication between social workers, carers and schools (see Fletcher-Campbell, 1998; Thomas & O'Kane, 1999; Berridge, Henry, Jackson, & Turney, 2009).

### 1.3.1 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The attainment of at least 'five good GCSE's is viewed by the government, as not only the benchmark for enabling access to further and/or higher education, training or employment, but also as a key route out of deprivation (DfES, 2004). As a result of significant advances in the collation and publication of national statistics which are annually monitored the disparity,

in terms of educational outcomes, between LAC and their non-looked after peers, has become increasingly evident (McAuley & Davis, 2009), as can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Educational indicators of Looked-After Children in comparison with Non- Looked-After Children**

	<b>Looked After Children</b>	<b>Non-Looked after Children</b>
5 or more A* - C GCSE's including English and Mathematics	12.0%	52.1%
No SEN	33.4%	82.1%
SEN without Statement	37.6%	15.1%
SEN with Statement	29.0%	2.8%
Exclusions		
Fixed Term Exclusions	9.78%	1.92%
Permanent Exclusions	0.11%	0.06%

Source: Department for Education, Statistical First Release, 2014

Significantly fewer LAC achieve the desired 5 or more A\* - C GCSE's including English and Mathematics, currently only 12.0% of LAC compared with 52.1% of non-looked after children; and represents, among other factors, a significant barrier to further/higher education and/or employment for the LAC population (Driscoll, 2011).

Previously LAC have been shown to be disproportionately represented within the special educational needs system (Jackson & McParlin, 2006; Martin & Jackson, 2002) and this continues to be the case with approximately two thirds of all LAC children having SEN of some type. LAC children who experience a 'significant' SEN, supported through a Statement of Special Educational Needs (29.0%), far exceeds the figure observed in non-looked after children (2.8%). In 2014, the most common type of SEN was 'behavioural, emotional and social difficulties' which accounted for 49.0% of LAC who had this as their primary need at School Action Plus and 38.9% of LAC pupils with a Statement (Department for Education, 2014).

The permanent exclusion rate for LAC is nearly twice as high as for all children, and the fixed-term exclusion rate is over five times as high as for all children. However, although these rates suggest that there is still much work to be done, they reflect a considerable reduction over the past four years (Department for Education, 2014). Employment outcomes for care leavers in England have also previously been shown to be particularly concerning suggesting that approximately a third of care leavers do not progress into further education, employment or training (Department for Education, 2010).

Whilst the complexities in improving the educational outcomes of LAC should not be underestimated (Gallagher, Brannan, Jones & Westwood, 2004) there is a very real danger that low expectations of LAC can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, it has been emphasised that we should resist the notion of a linear correlation between being in care and poor educational outcomes acknowledging that:

*“First and foremost, those in care are children and young people. We must have high ambitions and expectations for them. We must help them to reach their potential by providing excellent parenting, a high quality education, opportunities to develop their talents and skills, and effective support for their transition to adulthood”*

*(Department for Educational and Skills, 2007, p.5)*

The current study seeks to further develop our understanding of the factors which assist or impede the educational progress, particularly LAC outcomes at Key Stage 4, which at present continues to warrant further exploration.

## 1.4 KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Research involving young people is an important means by which to engage their rights under the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (Driscoll, 2011). Further, young people view their active participation in decision making as important to them (Davey, 2006) and want their views to be listened to with genuine consideration (Aubrey & Dahl,

2006). Achieving this is particularly relevant for vulnerable and/or hard-to-reach groups since as Fletcher-Campbell and Archer (2003) note the alternative can become somewhat self-fulfilling: *"it is important that such research does get done: otherwise, only those young people to whom access is relatively unproblematic appear in case studies and the 'hard to reach' remain thus"* (p. 11).

One way of supporting services to place children and young people at their centre is through completing evidence based research with them in which they are positioned as key-stakeholders. Winter (2006) contends that this conceptualisation shifts the role of LAC from being passive recipients within research to active participants and argues for this approach to become more embedded within research and particularly within research concerning LAC. It has become increasingly acknowledged that children and young people are themselves active agents who exert influence over their situation as well as being influenced by their circumstances (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Children often bring with them a 'wealth of practical knowledge and experience' (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 124) and it has become steadily recognised that they are uniquely positioned to inform professionals not only about how to improve their personal circumstances but how to inform practice and service development more generally.

## 1.5 PHILISOPHICAL ORIENTATION OF THIS RESEARCH

The current study operates within a critical realist stance. This had implications for the study in several ways, for example, the researcher sought to explore and 'explain' rather than simply describe data. In addition, the views of LAC were sought in conjunction with the professionals who support them and who are likely to present an alternative perspective from those in care. The philosophical underpinnings will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3.

## 1.6 RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

LAC are over represented within the special needs system (Department for Education, 2014a; Jackson & McParlin, 2006; Martin & Jackson, 2002) and often form a significant proportion of the workloads of most Educational Psychology services (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires and O'Connor, 2006; Jackson & McParlin, 2006).

It has been suggested that Educational Psychologists (EP) have a clear and distinctive contribution to make to the lives of looked-after children and young people (Farrell et al., 2006) and social work departments have indicated the potential for a broader role for EPs in relation to supporting LAC (Bradbury, 2006). The DECP (2006) recognise that EP's:

*"...have knowledge of how children learn and why they sometimes fail, managing behaviour and knowledge of childhood difficulties...they have a contribution to make to understanding the dilemmas of looked after/adopted children such as the feelings of rejection and alienation can have on their functioning and sense of belonging...can thereby influence the practice of significant people in the lives of looked after children in the provision of appropriate and effective support"*

(p. 9).

Despite this, the range and scope of EP practice concerning LAC has been inconsistent across services (Division of Educational and Child Psychology, DECP, 2006) and there has been a need for further research in relation to LAC among EP's (Norwich, Richards & Nash, 2010). It is envisioned that the current study will help to inform the work of all professionals, including EP's in understanding the needs of LAC and how they may be better supported.

## 1.7 RATIONALE

At present the attainment gap between LAC and their non-looked after peers at Key Stage 4 stands at 40.1 percentage points indicating that despite increased provision and legislation over the last two decades, educational outcomes for LAC remain poor. Further, the government makes it explicitly known that:

*"Closing the attainment and progress gap between LAC and their peers and creating a culture of high aspirations for them is a top priority [for local authorities]"*

(Department for Education, 2014, p. 5)



It is clear that EPs can make a distinctive contribution to the lives of looked-after children and young people (Farrell et al., 2006) however there is currently an insufficient amount of research which explores the needs of LAC from within the profession. Furthermore, research concerning what assists or hinders the educational progress of LAC, which positions young people on an equal footing with other key stakeholders, and which explores data to 'explain' rather than simply 'describe' what mechanisms-in-context contribute to low achievement is currently limited.

Overall, the aim of this research is to provide a theoretical framework, for the researcher's local authority to find out 'what works' in supporting the educational achievement of LAC at Key Stage 4. It is envisioned that the insights derived from this research can be useful in helping to inform educational practice, in relation to LAC, in other similar contexts.

## 1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter orientated the reader to the scope and rationale underlying the current research. It highlighted the significant disparities in terms of educational outcomes between LAC and their non-looked after peers, which provides a clear rationale for why further research into what supports their education is still necessary. In the next chapter the researcher explores in detail the research literature concerning what supports the educational progress of LAC.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter explores existing research concerning what is currently known about the factors which assist or impede the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4. The chapter begins by providing a rationale for conducting a literature review prior to data collection and its compatibility with a grounded theory approach as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). The chapter then provides details about the literature search performed before exploring existing literature relating to mechanisms in place to support the educational progress of LAC. Finally, the rationale for conducting further research using a qualitative grounded theory approach is presented.

### 2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW WITHIN A GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

Traditionally a literature review occurs prior to data collection; however, early versions of GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) explicitly oppose this. Glaser and Strauss (1967), stress that in surveying the field prior to data collection the researcher undermines the authenticity of emerging theory being guided by the data. In contrast, authors have argued that there is *"...no reason why a researcher cannot be self aware and be able to appreciate other theories without imposing them on the data"* (Urquhart, 2007, p. 351). Further, others have highlighted that the desire to remain open to the possibilities of imposing a predetermined understanding upon the research process is not a concern which is unique to or can be limited to GT and or one which cannot be overcome (Heath, 2006).

It should also be noted that this, among a range of issues, is where Glaser and Strauss begin to depart ideologically. Strauss's position in relation to completing a literature review

prior to data collection shifted to one which acknowledges both the benefits and pitfalls of doing so (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Whilst Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.35) stress that when using a grounded theory approach there is 'no need to review all of the literature beforehand' they point out that using 'technical literature' can:

- Be a source for making comparisons
- Enhance sensitivity
- Provide questions for initial observations and interviews
- Stimulate questions during analysis
- Suggest areas for theoretical sampling

(Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.37)

Further, there are also a range of pragmatic reasons as to why we may complete an early review of the literature when using grounded theory. Firstly, it can provide a clear rationale for a study, including providing a cogent justification for using a specific research approach (Coyne & Cowley, 2006), which is also important for studies which have a dual purpose, i.e. as in the current study which aims to add to existing knowledge base but also serves a wider function of achieving a particular qualification. Secondly, it can help to contextualise the study (McCann & Clark, 2003), develop theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Urquhart, 2007), facilitate the researcher's understanding of how the phenomenon has been explored to date (Denzin, 2002) whilst hopefully reducing the risk of completing a study which has already been done (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). Finally, it operates in line with the constant comparative method, which is integral to grounded theory and requires the researcher to reflect on how gathered data and existent knowledge and can be integrated into the emerging theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

With regard to the current study the researcher acknowledged the area under investigation, the education of LAC, has a strong and wide ranging research base. In light of this, the decision was taken by the researcher to complete a systematic literature review prior to data collection in order to facilitate his theoretical understanding of the emerging data (McCann & Clark, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) whilst having measures in place which facilitate his

critical reflexivity and the robustness of the GT approach (See Chapter 3, Section 3.6.6.2). This will help to ensure that the researcher is ultimately guided by emergent concepts that transpire during data collection in line with the inductive approach inherent in GT methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## 2.3 METHOD OF OBTAINING PAPERS

The literature search for this study was conducted on 27.03.2015 using EBSCO Host available through the Tavistock and Portman online library catalogue which included the following databases: '*PsycInfo*', '*Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*' and '*PsycArticles*'. A literature search (27.03.2015) was also completed using the '*Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)*' database. The researcher also compared reference lists of papers in order to find relevant and seminal papers in the areas of education and LAC.

The researcher sought to explore literature pertaining to the following areas: The attainment of LAC; research including the perspectives of LAC in relation to their educational experiences within secondary schools; supporting the academic attainment of LAC at Key Stage 4. As such the following search terms were used:

- Achievement **AND** Looked After Children
- Emotional Wellbeing **AND** Looked After Children
- Attainment **AND** Looked After Children
- Educational Psychology **AND** Looked After Children

*\*Key Stage 4' was used as a search term initially however this term was deemed unhelpful as, despite a range of studies having a focus on this phase of education, the term yielded limited results. As such it was discarded.*

The search conducted gave rise to a large number of papers however this was reduced once the researcher limited the search to papers published between 2004 and 2015. This decision was taken as this was in line with the introduction of the Children's Act 2004, which amended the Children's 1989 Act, and which introduced several new foci which had significant implications for children in care, for example, a strong focus on multi-agency working. As such the researcher deemed this an appropriate starting point. Other

parameters in place were 'age' i.e. the papers focused on secondary schooling. However, in some instances reducing the papers by age brought about no papers and in these cases this limiter was removed. All papers were included on the basis that they had been 'peer reviewed'.

Once the researcher obtained his set of papers an iterative screening process was performed. This included examining the titles and abstracts of papers in order to assess their relevance to the current study. Where the pertinence of a paper to the current study was unclear the researcher consulted the paper more fully i.e. read the article, to establish its relevance through applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria (Section 2.3.1). Details of the 'literature search' and the 'reasons for excluding papers' can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C respectively.

### 2.3.1 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The current literature search included studies completed within mainstream schools, colleges and alternative provisions but excluded non-school settings i.e. residential settings or homeschooling and studies which involved LAC participants who had statements for difficulties other than Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). The researcher decided to limit his literature search to studies on LAC which were conducted in the UK due to significant variations in educational structure, legislation and educational provisions for LAC outside of the UK.

The considerations above are reflected in the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this literature review detailed below:

- Studies have a primary focus on the educational progress of LAC
- Studies are concerned with secondary education and primarily Key Stage 4
- Studies are related to the education of LAC within mainstream settings and alternative provisions- which includes specialist schools but excludes residential and homeschooling

- Studies are published in English
- Studies are investigative in nature
- UK studies
- Studies were peer reviewed

Studies were excluded if they:

- Did not have a primary focus on the educational progress of LAC
- Were not concerned with secondary education or did not make reference to Key Stage 4
- Were not published in English
- Not a UK study
- Were not investigative in nature i.e. based on opinion, book reviews, primarily theoretical
- Were not peer reviewed papers

Having followed these steps and applied the inclusion/exclusion criteria six studies were identified. A further study, by Martin & Jackson (2002), was included in this literature review after being brought to the attention of the researcher from two of the articles already included. The researcher assessed the study against the inclusion criteria and it was deemed relevant to the current research and therefore included in this literature review. Where relevant, the literature considered in this review will also be contextualised within government legislation and/or publications. All articles were analysed in depth and the researcher drew on the Critical Appraisal Skill Programme checklist (CASP, 2014) to facilitate this process. The CASP is a recognized appraisal tool which helps researchers to think about the robustness of studies.

## 2.4 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES REVIEWED

A summary of the main characteristics of the seven articles included in the current literature review is provided in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Articles Included in the Literature Review**

Title of Article	Author	Participants	Methodology	Country
Closing the gap: investigating the barriers to educational achievement for looked after children	O'Sullivan, A., & Westerman, R. (2007). Closing the gap: investigating the barriers to educational achievement for looked after children. <i>Adoption &amp; fostering</i> , 31(1), 13-20.	187 children across three cohorts and two neighbouring Local Authorities	Cohort tracking study. Analysed and assessed Key stage data.	England, UK
Educational Success from a group of high achievers.	Martin, P. Y., & Jackson, S. (2002). Educational success for children in public care: advice from a group of high achievers. <i>Child &amp; family social work</i> , 7(2), 121-130.	N= 38. Participants either spent at least a year in foster care or in a residential home.	Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, measures of health, locus of control and self-esteem.	England, UK
Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities	McClung, M., & Gayle, V. (2010). Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities. <i>Child &amp; Family Social Work</i> , 15(4), 409-431.	Quantitative Dataset - N=1407; Qualitative-N=30; Age range 11-19 years old; 23 LAC, 7 Care leavers	Mixed Methods- Dataset developed from official and administrative records from two Scottish LA's; In-depth interviews	Scotland, UK
Schooling and Looked After Children: Exploring contexts and outcomes in Standard Attainment Tests	Davey, D., & Pithouse, A. (2008). Schooling and Looked after Children: Exploring Contexts and Outcomes in Standard Attainment Tests (SATs). <i>Adoption &amp; Fostering</i> , 32(3), 60-72.	N=14; Explored LAC in foster care and residential care.	Longitudinal case study spanning 2002-2006.	Wales, UK

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title of Article	Author	Participants	Methodology	Country
When lack of data is data: Do we really know who our looked-after children are?	Jacklin, A., Robinson, C., & Torrance, H. (2006). When lack of data is data: do we really know who our looked-after children are?. <i>European journal of special needs education</i> , 21(1), 1-20.	Database study 1999/2000. Cites participant sample as 138	Assessment of database data and pupil files.	England, UK
Who takes care of education? Looked after children's perception of support for educational progress	Harker, Dobel-Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair (2003)	N=80; Age range 10-18 years old; Participants in care for at least 3 months.	Longitudinal; Qualitative-Semi-structured interviews.	England, UK
Who takes care of education 18 months on? A follow-up study of Looked after children's perception of support for educational progress	Harker, Dobel-Ober, Akhurst, Berridge, & Sinclair (2004)	N=56; Age range 10-18 years old; Participants in care for at least 3 months.	Longitudinal; Qualitative-Semi-structured interviews.	England, UK



Various methodological approaches were utilised by the studies included in this literature review. The majority of studies included in this review (Davey & Pithouse, 2008; Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Harker et al., 2003; Harker et al., 2004) drew upon semi-structured or in-depth interviews, sometimes alongside other forms of data collection such as questionnaires, to elicit the views of children in care. This allowed for the perspectives of individuals with direct experiences of the complexities being in care, and of receiving an education whilst being in care, to contribute to the researcher's understanding of what supports the education of LAC.

Martin & Jackson (2002), a follow-up study of Jackson and Martin (1998), examined the opinions of 38 high achieving young people, who had spent at least a year in residential or foster care. The aim of the study was to capture the views of 'successful' care leavers and to identify what made them successful. Participants in the study were asked to give their views in relation to what they thought were the best ways to enhance the educational experience of LAC. The studies by Harker et al. (2003) and Harker et al. (2004) represent a longitudinal study in which the experiences of LAC who participated in *the 'taking care of education'* development programme are described and then followed up 18 months later to further understand their perceptions of educational progress. They also obtained other qualitative data with regards to the general educational experiences of the participants.

McClung & Gayle (2010) collected in-depth information on the care and educational experiences of 30 looked-after children across two Scottish local authorities. In terms of age, 50% (15) were aged 11–15 years old and 50% (15) were aged 16–19 years old and the project was particularly interested in pupil's attainment in the Scottish national qualifications at secondary school level, equivalent to end of Year 11 secondary examinations in England.

Using a grounded theory approach, Davey and Pithouse (2008) tracked the educational experiences and outcomes of a small group of LAC from one local authority in South Wales between 2002 and 2006. Young people were interviewed as they entered school Year 9, and again in Year 11. The aim of the study was to identify, mainly from young people themselves, what assisted or impeded their achievements at school. In the study the researchers also consulted professionals who worked with LAC to further understand how best to support their education both at a strategic level and 'on the ground'.

The remaining studies sought to contextualise the experiences of LAC and understand what supported their progress through using in depth database or documentary analysis (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007; Jacklin et al., 2006). Jacklin et al. (2006) analysed data consisting of a lists of LAC provided by local authorities, and analysis of a sample of school files for 59 of these students. The aim of the research was to identify and describe, as closely as possible, the composition and the key features of a specified cohort of 15–16 year olds (Year 11), in relation to educational experience and attainment. O'Sullivan and Westerman (2007) tracked the records of individual LAC from GCSE back through Key Stages 3, 2 and 1 in order to understand differences in attainment between LAC and their non looked-after peers.

Some of the studies (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Davey & Pithouse, 2008) did not distinguish between residential and foster care placement, in terms of the subsequent implications for their involvement in the study i.e. as has been done in the current study. Most of the studies included a broad range of age groups which included young children (as low as 12 years old) in addition to retrospective experiences of care leavers (Harker et al., 2003; Harker et al., 2004; McClung & Gayle, 2010; O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007), or relied solely on the views of care leavers (Martin & Jackson, 2002). Only two of the studies (Davey & Pithouse 2008; Jacklin et al., 2006) could be considered to have focused on 'contemporary views' i.e.

between the ages of 14-17. In addition, with the exception of Davey and Pithouse (2008), who report that this was done elsewhere (Davey, 2006), none of the studies incorporated the views of both young people and professionals. Further, in terms of theoretical orientation, only Davey and Pithouse (2008) utilised a GT approach in trying to understand the data in terms of what facilitates progress.

It should also be noted that the majority of the studies were conducted in England with the exception of McClung and Gayle (2010) which was in Scotland and Davey and Pithouse (2008) in Wales.

## 2.5 WHAT SUPPORTS OR INHIBITS THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF LAC

### 2.5.1 INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Over the last two decades there has been a significant shift towards interagency collaboration with an emphasis on bringing together the expertise and knowledge of the child among range of professionals to create a holistic understanding of the child or young person. Working in this way is believed to support positive outcomes for children and young people generally and in terms of their education (DfES, 2005), including LAC (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge & Sinclair, 2004).

In relation to facilitating interagency collaboration within the context of LAC are the roles of the Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) and the Designated Teacher (DT) for LAC. The role of the VSH was introduced in the 2007 with a remit to act as the local authority coordinator of the education of LAC. It was envisaged that through working in partnership with school improvement officers, headteachers and DT, the VSH would act as a source of expertise to bring about improvements in the education of LAC, for example, through reducing absence, tackling exclusions and ensuring that provision met individual learning needs (Lobley &

Beckwith, 2008). DT's are thought to provide *"the important link between the school, the child or young person's lead professional and social worker, the virtual school head and other children's services"*. (Department for Education and Skills, 2007, pp.70-71)

A number of studies made reference to the professional network, the importance of professional intervention and support or the professional developing a relationship with the LAC (Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Harker et al., 2003; Harker et al., 2004). However, a number of the studies were conducted before the introduction of the VSH and DT in 2007; as such they are unable to comment upon the impact of these roles on the education of LAC. Of the studies that were completed after this date (Davey & Pithouse, 2008; McClung & Gayle, 2010; O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007) the impact of these roles were not commented upon.

Further, the researcher noted that in these studies (Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Harker et al., 2003; Harker et al., 2004) whilst the importance of professionals was identified they were not considered within the context of interagency collaboration to support the education of LAC. This is likely to have been due to the fact that the views of professionals were not involved in these studies and so the researchers were unable to comment upon this and in this regard represent some of their limitations.

In the remaining studies, the significant challenges professionals face in relation to identifying and tracking the needs of LAC and using this information to effectively support their education was noted (Jacklin et al. 2006; Davey & Pithouse, 2008). Jacklin et al. conclude that it was not possible to establish clear baseline data in relation to the diversity and the needs of LAC due to the incomplete nature of the data within the files. Further they suggested that ultimately a lack of data resulted in agencies being unable to clearly identify

the children for whom they were responsible and clearly highlight the challenges of inter-agency and intra-agency collaboration for the LAC population.

Davey and Pithouse (2008) stressed that there was an *"insufficient monitoring of accommodated children in respect of school histories, transitions and trajectories and consequently a lack of reliable information"* (p.70) at a strategic level. They also indicate a lack of clarification in terms of duties and responsibilities with regards to LAC education between social care and education which resulted in a lack of accountability about whose duty it was to monitor educational continuity and progress of LAC.

O'Sullivan & Westerman (2007) also consider the implications 'a lack of data' has for a LAC Personal Education Plan (PEP). All LAC are required to have a care plan (Department for Children Schools and Families, DCSF, 2009), of which the PEP is an integral part and falls within the remit of the DT. They question *"how an effective PEP can be developed when so many pieces of the jigsaw are missing"* (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007, p. 17).

## 2.5.2 PLACEMENT STABILITY

Stability emerged as a significant issue in the majority of the studies. O'Sullivan and Westerman (2007) highlighted that the stability of home and/or school placements can have a significant impact on pupil attainment. In the study, of the pupils who experienced more than ten changes of placement during their time in care, 60 per cent did not go on to their GCSE examinations. Of the remaining 40 per cent, who sat their examinations, only six per cent achieved any GCSE passes at grade A\*–C and none achieved five passes at grade A\*–C. However, the correlation between continuity of care/school placement and educational achievement is not a new finding nor is the finding that students who experience the most

changes of placement are the least likely to be entered for any GCSE exams (Jackson, 1998; Evans, 2003; Fletcher- Campbell and Archer, 2003).

Moreover, what is important about the study is that it focuses our attention not only on changes in placement but also on 'timing'. Whilst any placement move can potentially be disruptive and have a negative impact on pupil attainment, the impact of the placement change may be *more* or *less* significant depending on the timing of the move, and as a significant number of youngsters enter care in their early teens (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007) placement moves are very likely to have significant implications for LAC at KS4. In the study approximately 50 children moved schools during Year 10 or 11, of which half did not sit any GCSE examinations, and those who did may have achieved better grades if they had not been moved during this critical time (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007).

Finally, O'Sullivan and Westerman (2007) suggest that the data collected in the study was impacted by the quality of information held by the local authority and/or the professionals. The finding indicates a need for local authorities to collate and hold high quality information about LAC in their care, and that this information needs to be accessible to relevant professional and/or organisations i.e. education and social services. In the context of multiple placements this finding is significant as potentially having access to high quality information and effective communication systems may facilitate more successful transitions between placements.

Davey and Pithouse (2006) contend that the propensity towards poor educational achievement for many LAC is *"matched by a lack of strategic and conceptual capacity by providers to build innovative mechanisms that promote stability and/or compensate for its absence in the histories of those entering (and re-entering) accommodation"* (Davey & Pithouse, 2008, p. 70). Martin and Jackson (2002) argue that stability relates to both the care placement and the school placement. They stress that whilst placement stability is an

advantage it is not sufficient in itself. More importantly, they suggest that continuity of the school placement in the context of a placement change can help to mediate the impact of the change through creating a sense of continuity in at least one aspect of the child's life.

With regard to school placement, McClung and Gayle (2010) found that the primary reason for this change was due to exclusion of the child. Almost all children in the study felt that they could have prevented being excluded if they had improved their behaviour. Interestingly, however, this was also directly linked to there being a lack of understanding from teachers and other pupils in relation to what it is like to be LAC. This appears to present a worrying situation in which the child is potentially having to 'bear the responsibility' for possible exclusions.

### 2.5.2.1 STABILITY AND ATTACHMENT

Attachment theory relates to the emotional presentation and/or behaviour of a child and can be understood as being influenced by their understanding of the role of the caregiver, the family and their early childhood experiences (Delaney & Kunstall, 1997). As such, the quality of attachment experiences is viewed as having the capacity to subsequently impact on a child's understanding of how relationships function and, therefore, has specific implications for learning and a young person's capacity for learning (Geddes, 2006).

In addition to direct links to educational attainment a lack of continuity and stability also impacts on children's capacity to develop relationships (attachments) with teachers and/or professionals and on their willingness to trust in their guidance (Peake, 2011). The felt need for security remains constant (Cortina & Marrone, 2003) and reinforces the importance of placement stability, and is particularly relevant for LAC when you consider that they have experienced some form of loss and/or separation from their biological parents and, as highlighted above have often experienced multiple care placements and school changes. It

is unlikely that temporary or short term placements are conducive to either the child or the carer to invest in the relationship (Peake, 2011).

### 2.5.3 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Children often enter the care system already experiencing significant emotional and behavioural difficulties, with the majority of children entering the care system having experienced some form of abuse and/or neglect (Department for Education, 2014a). Further reinforcing this point, Peake (2011) states that:

*"While a move into the care system may be deemed to be the best or least detrimental alternative, the process by which the child has come to be looked after will have its own impact on the child" (p.74)*

The emotional needs of LAC were identified in three of the studies reviewed. Harker et al. (2004) found that the emotional needs of LAC could be supported through a significant adult. In the study the young person's school teacher was identified as a key source of emotional support and 'school' in general was identified as having a key role in being able to provide a source of emotional support for LAC. Emotional support was received from LAC's foster/residential carer through providing advice and encouragement and was linked to supporting their education.

This was also reported by participants in the Martin and Jackson (2002) study, however they additionally indicated that emotional support needs to continue beyond Key Stage 4 and even during higher education. McClung & Gayle (2010) argue that more consideration needs to be given to where LAC are placed once they enter care and the extent to which the placement will be able to meet their needs, including their emotional needs.

Despite research highlighting the significance of understanding and supporting the emotional needs of LAC at present this is still lacking with research concluding that:



*"There is little consideration given by government to the trauma facing the child that blocks their ability to learn for a period of time. There's a need for building emotional resilience that must take priority over educational performance...once this has been attended to... then learning capacity improves" (Ofsted, 2012, p.28).*

#### 2.5.4 A SIGNIFICANT ADULT

Having access to a significant adult whether this was a member of staff or the young person's foster carer appears to impact positively on the education of LAC. In the studies by Harker et al. (2003; 2004) three quarters of looked-after children expressed that they could talk to and felt supported by at least one adult in their life. This included teaching staff, care staff, parents and carers. 60% said that there was at least one person who asked them about school on a regular basis, although fewer children (53%) were able to identify at least one person who was proud of their achievements. Interestingly, participants in the study were asked 'who at school should know that they were looked after?' Headteachers and guidance teachers were the people who were mainly identified. However, over half of the children in the study were unsure about what their school had been told in relation to them being looked after and more than half of the children stated that they had not received any support in relation to working out what they were going to tell other children at school about being looked after.

LAC also felt that having access to a mentor who developed a positive relationship could also support their educational progress (Martin and Jackson, 2002). Although there were instances where children were unsure about whom they could identify or go to as a source of support in relation to their education (Davey & Pithouse, 2008). Consistent with this, whilst the majority (78%) of children in the Harker et al. (2004) study gave examples of individuals who had supported their educational progress, a fifth of the participants could not identify a single example of a supportive person.

### 2.5.5 ELICITING THE VOICE OF LAC

Taking into account the views of vulnerable children can often lead to more successful interventions (Triseliotis, Boreland & Lambert, 1995) and the absence of the 'views' of LAC in research has been criticised within the literature previously. However simply eliciting the views of LAC is not enough and it is equally important to ensure that these views are heard, listened to and incorporated into practice which is still lacking (House of Commons, Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2009).

McClung and Gayle (2010) report that only a third of LAC indicated being consulted about their education by their social worker. This may suggest that with regards to the educational needs of LAC this is not viewed as a being a priority for social workers. This is further reinforced by the fact that McClung and Gayle (2010) report that children in the study were more likely to be asked for their views about their care by their social workers.

A further aspect of eliciting the views of the young person is to consider the ways in which they are involved in decision making and we know that young people view their active participation in decision making as important to them (Davey, 2008). However, only a small number of studies included in this review commented upon this. Harker et al. (2003) reports that LAC participants acknowledged the possibility that all of their needs may not be met but expressed a desire to at least be taken seriously in relation to decisions that affected their lives. However, again, McClung & Gayle (2010) highlighted that children were more likely to be involved in decision-making about their care, rather than their education.

## 2.6 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Having examined the current literature the researcher identified the following issues:

- A number of the studies in this review reflect only the subjective experiences of LAC and, as in the current study which adopts a critical realist stance, may have benefited from eliciting the views of other key stakeholders i.e. social workers or foster carers, in order to develop a more contextual picture.
- Several of the studies included a wide age range spanning several stages of education. Only two of the studies in this review could be considered to have incorporated contemporary views of LAC. Thinking retrospectively about one's experience may be qualitatively different to more contemporary experiences of children currently working towards or having just taken their GCSE's in terms of what aided or hindered their progress. Therefore it can be argued that there is still a need for a more specific focus i.e. a particular key stage which addresses the specific needs of children during that phase of education.
- Since interagency collaboration was only relatively touched upon by the literature in this review a potential contribution of the current study might be the emergence of the ways in which 'interagency collaboration' is experienced by LAC and acts to support or hinder their educational progress.
- Only one study in this review could be considered to have developed an in-depth theoretical understanding of the data which can then be used to inform practice. As such research concerning what assists or hinders the educational progress of LAC, which positions young people on an equal footing with other key stakeholders, and

which explores data to 'explain' rather than simply 'describe' what mechanisms-in-context contribute to low achievement is currently limited.

- The researcher is acutely aware of the similarities between the current study and Davey & Pithouse (2008). However, whilst the knowledge gained from this study may be applied to similar contexts each local authority is likely to present its own unique challenges. For example, in terms of the operational mechanisms and how these are experienced, perceived facilitators and barriers by professionals and LAC and the extent to which the young person's voice is captured and involved in decision making processes. Therefore there is clear scope for further research using GT to contribute professionals understanding of how to support the education of LAC.
- Since the LAC population is not a homogenous group it would be unhelpful to assume that the experiences of LAC in the Davey (2008) reflect all lived experiences of children in care. Therefore while and Davey & Pithouse (2008) offer a solid basis for the current study it is hoped that there has been some notable progress since then.

## 2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided systematic examination of the literature specifically relating to the education of LAC at Key Stage 4. The researcher also identified clear gaps in the current literature and contends that there is still a clear need to further our understanding of the factors which support or hinder the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4. In the next chapter the researcher discusses in detail the epistemological alignment of the researcher, the methodological approach employed to explore the data and issues concerning validity and ethics within the current study.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Thus far, the researcher has provided the rationale for the current study and reviewed relevant literature pertaining to the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4. This chapter introduces the epistemological position, methodological approach and method of analysis of the current study. The chapter begins by providing the rationale for adopting a critical realist epistemological stance before moving on to detail the Grounded Theory approach implemented. Finally this chapter will discuss issues concerning the validity and ethics (Appendix J) relevant to this research.

### 3.2 RESEARCH AIMS

The current study operates within a critical realist approach and therefore seeks to explore contextual factors which act to facilitate or hinder the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4. The study incorporates both the contemporary perspectives of LAC and those of key professionals who are involved in supporting the education of LAC. Through a detailed analysis of the research data the researcher intends to develop a substantive theoretical explanation of the generative mechanisms and contextual factors which affect the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4.

#### 3.2.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

The Primary research question in this study is: What factors facilitate the educational progress of Looked After Children at Key Stage 4? In order to understand what supports progress the researcher also has to understand what hinders it. As such the sub-question of this study is: What factors hinder the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4?

### 3.3 ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Ontology is the study of 'being' and informs our epistemological position, the relationship between the inquirer and the known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), either implicitly or explicitly. A researcher's ontological position makes assumptions about what constitutes reality i.e. is there an objective reality which can be observed and pursued and measured through research, or is reality constructed through language and human interaction. This influences the way in which a researcher views what can be known and how this knowledge can be acquired and communicated (epistemology). Therefore differing ontological and epistemological positions may lead to different strategies of inquiry of the same phenomenon (Grix, 2004).

Houston (2010) argues that to understand the subjective experience of others, we must examine the interplay between the objective world and subjective experience. The researcher ascribes to this view and believes that it is pertinent to gaining a richer understanding of the complex, multi-layered and inter-related nature of the social and educational challenges faced by children within the care system. In line with this position the present study seeks to move beyond a 'literal' description of the educational experiences of young people in care toward a more conceptual understanding and representation of those experiences. Thus the researcher seeks to further his understanding of not only the experiences of LAC but also of the mechanisms and contexts which facilitate or hinder positive outcomes.

In light of the above the researcher has adopted a critical realist stance. Critical realism acknowledges the significance of individual interpretation in the construction of experience whilst being sensitive to the impact of the wider social and contextual affects upon these interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and is discussed in the next section.

### 3.3.1 CRITICAL REALISM

Phillips (1987) suggests that realism concerns the "view that entities exist independently of being perceived or independently of our theories about them" (p. 205). Within the social sciences the most prominent form of realism is *critical realism*. According to Maxwell (2012a) a distinctive feature of [critical] realism is that it denies that:

*"...we can have any 'objective' or certain knowledge of the world, and accept the possibility of alternative valid accounts of any phenomenon. All theories about the world are seen as grounded in a particular perspective and worldview, and all knowledge is partial, incomplete, and fallible" (p. 5).*

Hence critical realism both presupposes an objective reality which exists independently of our thoughts, and one which can be pursued through knowledge acquisition, whilst maintaining that reality is mediated through social constructs such as language, meaning-making and social context (Oliver, 2011). The critical realist perspective is one which proposes that whilst one cannot fully ascertain a true reality, it can be described with better or worse, truer or less true, accounts (Oliver, 2011). This view of reality has specific implications for the current study in that recognises both the validity of the individual experiences of the participants involved in the study whilst urging the researcher to consider a deeper understanding of the interactive nature of individual and contextual mechanisms which may have contributed to these experiences.

### 3.3.2 DEPARTURE FROM POSITIVISM AND INTERPRETIVISM

Critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998) can to an extent be aligned with the positivist tradition in relation to the idea that knowledge *should be* positively developed and applied. However where Bhaskar departs from the positivist tradition is in the *way in which* knowledge may be positively developed and applied.

The issue for Bhaskar, and a central feature of critical realism, is what Bhaskar considers the 'epistemic fallacy' which refers to the tendency to conflate ontology and epistemology; thus

confusing that which exists with the knowledge we have about it (Eastwood, Jalaludin & Kemp, 2014). In other words, reality is considered through the tools we use to illicit it and in doing so misconstrues reality. Bhaskar (1997) contends that what we end up with is a 'closed systems ontology', in which knowledge is taken to come only from observation. Scientific methods are required to be in line with this approach to knowledge which results in basing scientific method on observing fixed empirical patterns and assuming that nature is a closed system. However, Bhaskar (1997, 1998) argues that although one may create a closed system in a laboratory, the world outside the laboratory is an open system.

Bhaskar proposes that reality is stratified, distinguishing between the levels of the empirical, the actual, and the real. There is a clear distinction between the realm of observable events and that of underlying causal mechanisms which are not directly observable. Bhaskar (1975) argues that the domain of 'real structures' and other generative mechanisms require a larger conceptual map of reality. Therefore, critical realism offers an alternative to approaches which seek to reduce reality to either a 'law finding science' (positivism) or to the interpretation of meaning alone (interpretivism) (Sayer, 2000). Critical realism's acknowledgement of the necessity for having an interpretive understanding of the world is mediated by a modified naturalism and its pursuit of causal explanations (Sayer, 2000).

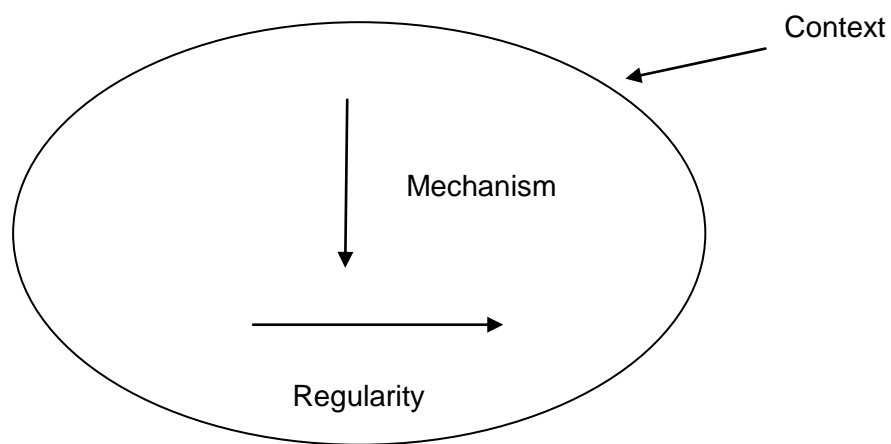
### 3.3.3 MECHANISMS IN CRITICAL REALISM

Central to critical realism is the endorsement of causality in both the natural and social sciences, and is viewed as being a real phenomenon that is intrinsic to either the nature of the world or our understanding of it (Maxwell, 2012a). Putnam (1990) argues that "*whether causation really exists or not, it certainly exists in our life world...The world of ordinary language (the world in which we actually live) is full of causes and effects*" (p. 89). However, causality, within critical realism "should not be understood in terms of universal, predictable patterns, but rather as contextual and emergent, in changeable societies" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 42).



Pawson and Tilley (1997) assert that a realist explanation considers both the underlying mechanism and the context. An outcome/experience or 'regularity' is generated by a mechanism being activated within the particular context (in Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Context, Mechanism and Regularity (Taken from Pawson and Tilley, 1997)**



Sayer (2000) suggests that "what causes something to happen has nothing to do with the number of times we observe it happening. Explanations instead depend on the identification of causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions" (p. 14). Sayer's (2000) arguments draw our attention to the contextual nature of generative mechanisms. As previously highlighted social research generally operates within an open-system and therefore the outcome or 'activation' of a mechanism is dependent on the context in which it is present. In other words mechanistic processes are always contextually determined. The task for the current study is to find the mechanisms that produce the actual phenomenon and to understand the interplay between them and how they shape the outcome (Danermark, 2002).

Danermark (2002) argues that within social research practical knowledge in terms of in order to achieve 'x' you must do 'y' is seldom achievable, and one may argue inappropriate. What this research can endeavour to achieve is to become more theoretically aware of the conditions in which positive outcomes for LAC can be facilitated, further contributing to the research knowledge base. Thus, in line with a critical realist approach, this study seeks to develop causal explanations through linking events and experiences observed in the data to their underlying generative mechanisms (Oliver, 2011); therefore producing a theoretical understanding which details what works, for whom and under which contextual conditions.

### 3.4. QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Guba & Lincoln (1994) assert that the selection of one's methodology is determined by the ontological and epistemological nature of the issues explored by the research questions. The focus of the present study concerns the perspectives of LAC in relation to issues affecting their educational progress. As such the research is both exploratory and explanatory, seeking to further understand the mechanisms that influence the individual educational experiences of LAC within a given context.

Denzin & Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as:

*"...a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).*

Therefore qualitative approaches are employed when it becomes necessary to understand the meaning or nature of an individual's experience and can involve gathering data through various means such as the use of semi-structured interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2008) suggest that quantitative approaches are less successful

because the "*immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order of the natural world*" (p. 11). With respect to the current research in particular, capturing the complex and interactive nature of the personal, social and emotional experiences which impact on the education of LAC is unlikely to be achieved through larger scale, quantitative research alone (Goddard, 2000). The researcher is of the view that qualitative approaches are equipped to elicit and ensure that participants' views are represented more so than quantitative approaches (Davies and Wright, 2008).

### 3.4.1 CRITICAL REALISM WITHIN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Snape and Spencer (2003) argue that there is no single accepted way of conducting qualitative research. Instead conducting qualitative inquiry is dependent on a range of factors including the researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs about the world. However the relationship between ontology and epistemology is not straightforward; individuals may develop differing epistemological positions whilst ascribing to the same ontological values. Frazer and Lacey (1993) suggest that "even if one is a realist at the ontological level, one *could* be an epistemological interpretivist . . . our knowledge of the real world is inevitably interpretive and provisional rather than straightforwardly representational" (p. 182).

Critical realists therefore remain embedded within ontological realism (a reality exists independently of our perceptions and constructs of the world) whilst acknowledging aspects of epistemological constructivism and relativism (the understanding that the world is inevitably constructed from our individual perspectives and vantage points). Consequently it is possible to see how the qualitative methodological approach within the current study is consistent with a critical realist epistemological stance.

### 3.4.2 UNDERSTANDING CAUSATION IN QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGIES

The researcher acknowledges that traditionally the concept of causation within qualitative research has been controversial, with the idea of causation being viewed as incompatible with interpretive or constructivist approaches (Maxwell, 2012b). However this implies the adoption of a relatively narrow positivist conception of causation at the expense of alternative understandings of causation inherent within critical realism (Eastwood, Jalaludin & Kemp, 2014).

Maxwell (2012b) indicates that it is *"necessary to explore a different model of causation that fits better with what we know about the actual workings of social processes"* (p. 657). He further contends that in order to do this we must first accept the complete inadequacy of the traditional positivist notion of causality: *"that causation is no more than regularity"* (Maxwell, 2012b, p. 657). According to Little (2010), social causation manifests through the behaviour of individuals making choices within a given structure. Therefore adequate causal explanations in the social sciences depend on the in-depth understanding of meanings, contexts, and processes which can be provided through qualitative research approaches (Maxwell, 2012b).

### 3.5 DATA GATHERING

Semi-structured interviews are a widely used method of data collection in flexible qualitative research studies (Creswell, 2013) and can provide *"access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds"* (Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 100). Consequently semi-structured interviews were viewed as being the most appropriate method of data collection for this study.

Interviews in this research are broadly understood within the context of ideas put forward Kvale (1996) which suggest that qualitative interviews are a construction site for knowledge. This reflects the notion of a collaborative process in which there is an exchange of views between two individuals discussing a topic of mutual interest and/or significance. Thus interviews in this study are seen as a collaborative process in which knowledge is co-constructed.

Data gathered through semi-structured interviews can be meaningful both within and beyond the immediate context. For example Miller and Glassner (1997) argue that whilst the interview is a symbolic interaction *"this does not discount the possibility that knowledge of the social world beyond the interaction can be obtained"* (p.100). We are able to ascertain information about generative mechanisms, social discourses and contextual structures by inferring from their experienced effects. In other words through the examination of individual experiences i.e. analysing data gathered from semi-structured interviews completed with LAC, we are able to increase our understanding about the ways in which multiple causal mechanisms, including individual interpretations of events, interact, negate and reinforce each other (Oliver, 2011).

### 3.5.1 THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Prior to the interview the researcher liaised with the Designated Teacher for LAC and the young person's social worker to discuss the interview schedule and whether there were potentially sensitive topics for the young person. Interviews in the study consisted of three phases of development: *building rapport, exploration, concluding/debriefing*.

#### 3.5.1.2 BUILDING RAPPORT

The importance of creating a safe space and building rapport with the participant during an interview has been heavily emphasised (Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis & Dillon, 2003) and is particularly important for vulnerable groups i.e. LAC. In line with this the researcher adopted a person-centred approach which meant that the interviews proceeded at a pace that was comfortable for the participant. For example, in relation to LAC involved in this study, prior to commencing the interview the start of the interview the researcher engaged the young person in general conversation to help create a more relaxed atmosphere for example talking about the young person's interests and school more generally.

### 3.5.1.3 EXPLORATION

The interviews contained different types of questions including questions designed to elicit factual information, descriptive information, thoughts and feelings of the participants in relation to their experiences and questions which provoked thought with regards to facilitators and barriers to their educational progress.

The researcher used probes through the interview. Explanations are usually multi-layered, and iterative probing is a key qualitative interviewing technique that allows the researcher to be responsive to the participant in the interview and to start to uncover some of these layers. For example the researcher may ask the participant "why do you think X happened?" or "what was it about X that made you decide to Y?" The researcher was mindful that he inquired in a way that was sensitive and responsive to the young person and operated from a position of curiosity.

#### 3.5.1.4 CONCLUDING/DEBRIEFING

Following the interview the researcher discussed how the young person/professional experienced the interview process in general and asked whether they had any further questions. Participants were informed of possible avenues for support and how they could gain access to them should this be required. In the first instance, young people involved in this study were advised to liaise with their DT should they become experience any distress post-debriefing.

#### 3.5.2 PARTICIPANTS

In total eight participants took part in the study. Two participants were young people in care, of these, one participant entered care during Year 10 and one participant was described as being at the edge of care during Year 11 (with proceedings spanning Year 11/Year 12) and formally entered care during Year 12. A further young person in care expressed initial interest and consent to participate in the study was obtained. However, unfortunately due to competing demands the young person decided to withdraw from the study and did not complete an interview. The remaining six participants consisted of professionals who had direct experience of working with children and young people in care at Key Stage 4. This included three Virtual School Officers, a Virtual School Headteacher, a Designated Teacher for LAC and a Social Worker.

### 3.5.2.1 INCLUSION CRITERIA

#### 3.5.2.1.1 INCLUSION CRITERIA - YOUNG PERSON

Participants were initially selected on the basis that they were a LAC during KS4. However post-recruitment it emerged that one of the participants formally entered care in Year 12 (during Key Stage 5). The researcher reflected that the inclusion of this participant would increase the study's sensitivity to the experiences of LAC in terms of potential cross-phase breakdown in terms of stability of the home environment prior to their entry into care, acknowledging that entry into care is not a 'neat and tidy' process. Therefore it was felt that the experiences of this participant were of significant value to the current study and so included, however it is acknowledged that this may limit the degree to which the participant is able to comment on the specific experience of being a LAC at KS4 since they may not have had access, for example, to some of the support that a LAC might receive. Subsequently this meant expanding the inclusion criteria to also include those children who were on the edge of care during Key Stage 4 and who then formally entered care during Key Stage 5.

Location was a factor in this study; it was deemed that schools outside of the Greater London area may be distinctly different 'contextual environments'. Further, greater distances had practical implications for the researcher in that these schools were not viable for the researcher to travel to. Therefore LAC educated outside of Greater London were not included in the study. Therefore participants involved in this study met the following criteria:

- Participants were defined as a LAC under Section 20, 21, 31, or 38 of the Children's Act 1989.



- Participants were identified as a LAC during Key Stage 4 or were identified as being on the edge of care during Key Stage 4 and then formally entered care during Key Stage 5.
- The researcher's local authority was identified as the designated local authority responsible for the young person.
- Participants attended a mainstream school or alternative educational setting which also includes specialist behavioural schools in the Greater London area
- Participants were aged between 14-17

#### 3.5.2.1.2 INCLUSION CRITERIA - PROFESSIONALS

The involvement of professionals in this study was guided by emerging interview data following the LAC interviews. That is, the researcher completed interviews with two young people before deciding the most appropriate professionals to include. Once these had been identified information letters detailing the study were sent to the relevant professionals. The basic inclusion criteria for the involvement of professionals in this study were as follows:

- Individuals worked directly in an employed capacity with LAC at Key Stage 4 or they held a role in which they had a focus on the education of LAC including Key Stage 4.
- They held an active professional role within the researcher's borough or within an educational context in which a LAC, who was the responsibility of the researcher's local authority, attended.

#### 3.5.3 IDENTIFYING THE SAMPLE

The researcher was provided with an anonymised list of schools (only contact details of the schools) by his local authority and was informed that there were 80 LAC in the Borough who met

the study's inclusion criteria. The researcher was not provided with any names or other identifiable information of the young people attending the Schools/Alternative Provisions (AP).

Given the limited number of LAC who met the criteria the known challenges of LAC participating in research (Fletcher-Campbell & Archer, 2003), the researcher decided to make contact with the entire sample. The researcher initiated contact with Schools/AP's by emailing letters to the Designated Teacher for LAC/Headteacher which outlined the context of the research, the purpose of the study and how LAC may become involved if they wanted to. Schools/APs were only contacted on the understanding that they had a looked after child/children attending their setting at Key Stage 4. This was then followed up by a phone call.

With regards to the professionals involved in this study an opportunistic sampling method was employed. This meant sending out emails to the team managers of the relevant teams (social care team and virtual school team) and speaking to schools (previously contacted when seeking LAC participants) about staff members (DT) potentially becoming involved in the study. Subsequent participation depended upon response rate. Initial responses gave rise to two social workers, four virtual school officers and a DT. Unfortunately, after sending the information letters it was not possible to complete an interview with the second social worker due to availability and external time frames for data collection.

### 3.5.3.1 DEVELOPING THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

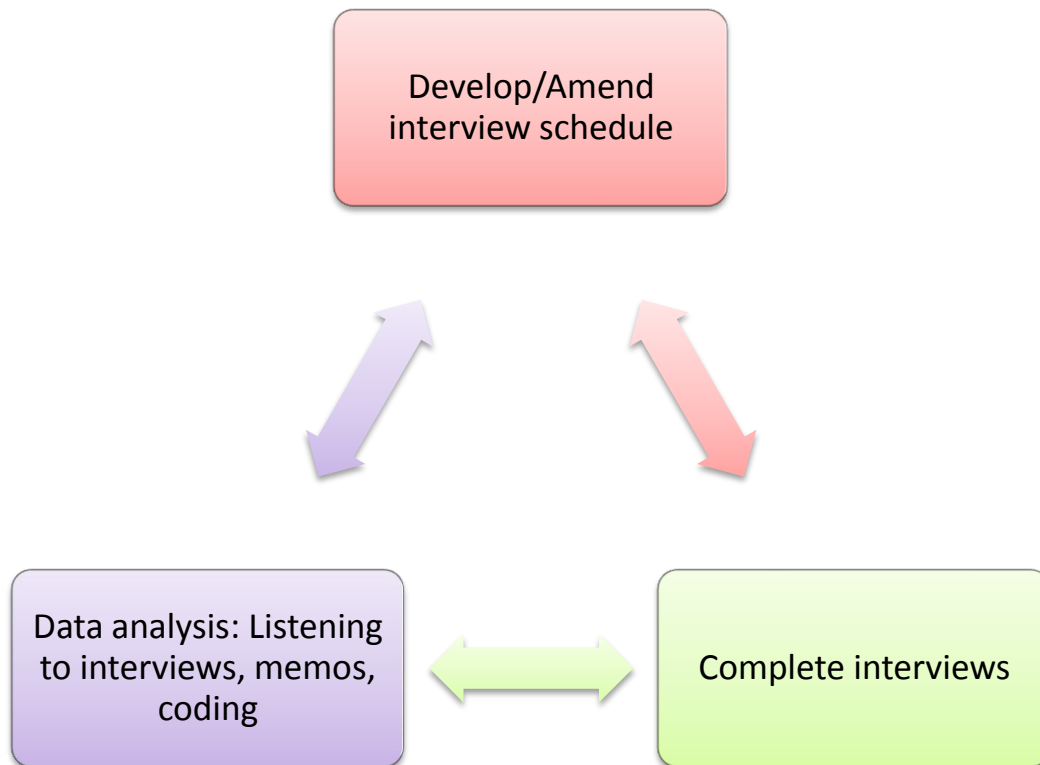
The interview schedules for LAC (Appendix D) and Professionals (Appendix E) were discussed with the researcher's supervisor and with colleagues in the Educational Psychology Service (EPS). This helped to assess the wording of the questions, how open-

ended they were and whether they related to the research question. This process also helped the researcher further identify questions that were repetitive and questions which required additional prompting. However, it should be noted that the interview schedules were used as a guide only and the direction of the interview was influenced by the participant.

### 3.5.3.2 THEORETICAL SAMPLING MODEL

As can be seen in Figure 2 the interview procedure is based on an iterative process, in line with the grounded theory approach. This allowed the researcher's hypotheses about initial data to guide subsequent data collection and the exploration of emerging theoretical concepts further. Initial interviews were completed with two young people. Immediately following each interview the researcher made notes on his computer to capture initial thoughts. He then listened to the digital recordings of the interviews in depth so that he could further expand upon these initial notes and take note of the themes and concepts that were emerging. This information was then used to develop the interview schedules for the professionals.

Four further interviews were completed with professionals (VSOs and a social worker) and the researcher repeated the initial analysis cycle (see Figure 2). Information gathered from these interviews informed the interview schedules for the two final interviews which were completed with a Virtual School Headteacher (VSH) and a DT. For example, issues about multi-agency working, what a good educational context for LAC 'looked like' and LAC decision making were further emphasised and explored in the final interviews. However it is important to be aware that whilst the schedules were informed by the previous interviews the researcher was still flexible in terms of allowing the participant to expand on areas which they felt were important to them.

**Figure 2: Interviewing Procedure within Theoretical Sampling Model of GT**

### 3.5.4 GAINING CONSENT

The Children's Act 1989 outlines the conditions in which children enter local authority care. The type of care order identified in the Children's Act 1989 had clear implications for the research and guided how the researcher obtained consent for each participant who took part in the study.

In the first instance the researcher obtained consent from the Director of Children's Services at his local authority. This provided the researcher with information about which Schools/AP's in the borough had a LAC attending their setting. At this stage the researcher was also gaining consent to make contact with the relevant provisions and to potentially conduct research with LAC that the LA were solely or partly responsible for.

In all cases further consent was obtained from the school and the young person themselves. Additional consent was obtained in one case where there was a dual guardianship for the young person with the young person's birth parents. Throughout the entire research process the researcher liaised with the participant's social worker.

With regards to adult participants involved in the study the researcher discussed the study in depth with the professionals following an expression of interest. They were provided relevant forms prior to the discussion so that they had an opportunity to read the information sheet and consent forms and have any questions about the research clarified during the pre-interview meeting. An interview was then completed if they decided to participate.

#### 3.5.4.1 PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The researcher initiated contact with schools that were identified as having LAC at Key Stage 4. The primary contact for the research was the DT and the study was explained to them in depth. In some cases the Headteacher was involved at this stage also. The DT then approached the relevant young person and discussed the research with them.

At this stage the young person made a decision about wanting to take part in the research and whether to/not to provide their consent. This mechanism was in place to promote the personal agency of all LAC participants within this research in terms of their decision making i.e. deciding to whether to be involved in a study of this nature and then being supported/have their decision facilitated by the DT or relevant professional. Decisions to participate (or not) were then communicated to the researcher by the DT. As such it was at this stage (if they said yes) that the young person became known to the researcher. He did not know the names of LAC who did not wish to take part.

A significant proportion of schools provided a range of reasons as to why the young person's involvement in the study would not be appropriate, for example, the young person currently having difficulty with their placement or experiences significant challenges at school. This meant that the DT did not present the research to the young person and presented significant challenges for the researcher in terms of LAC participation. This also has implications for the way in which LAC are empowered i.e. allowing them to decide for themselves whether they felt able to participate in the study. This further presents significant insight into the power dynamics between professionals and LAC with regards to their decision making capacities particularly and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Following consent from the young person the school then provided their consent and sent information letters to the young person's foster carer and social worker. The researcher was not made aware of the foster carer's details unless this action was initiated by the foster carer. However for a number of reasons, including gaining additional consent where necessary and ensuring the safety of the participants involved in the study, the researcher was provided with the details of the relevant social worker and liaised with them as appropriate. In the case of birth parent's sharing parental responsibility the researcher was guided by the social worker as to their normal protocols in relation to capacity assessments to provide consent. This was done on a case-by-case basis for example, in the case of the participant who withdrew.

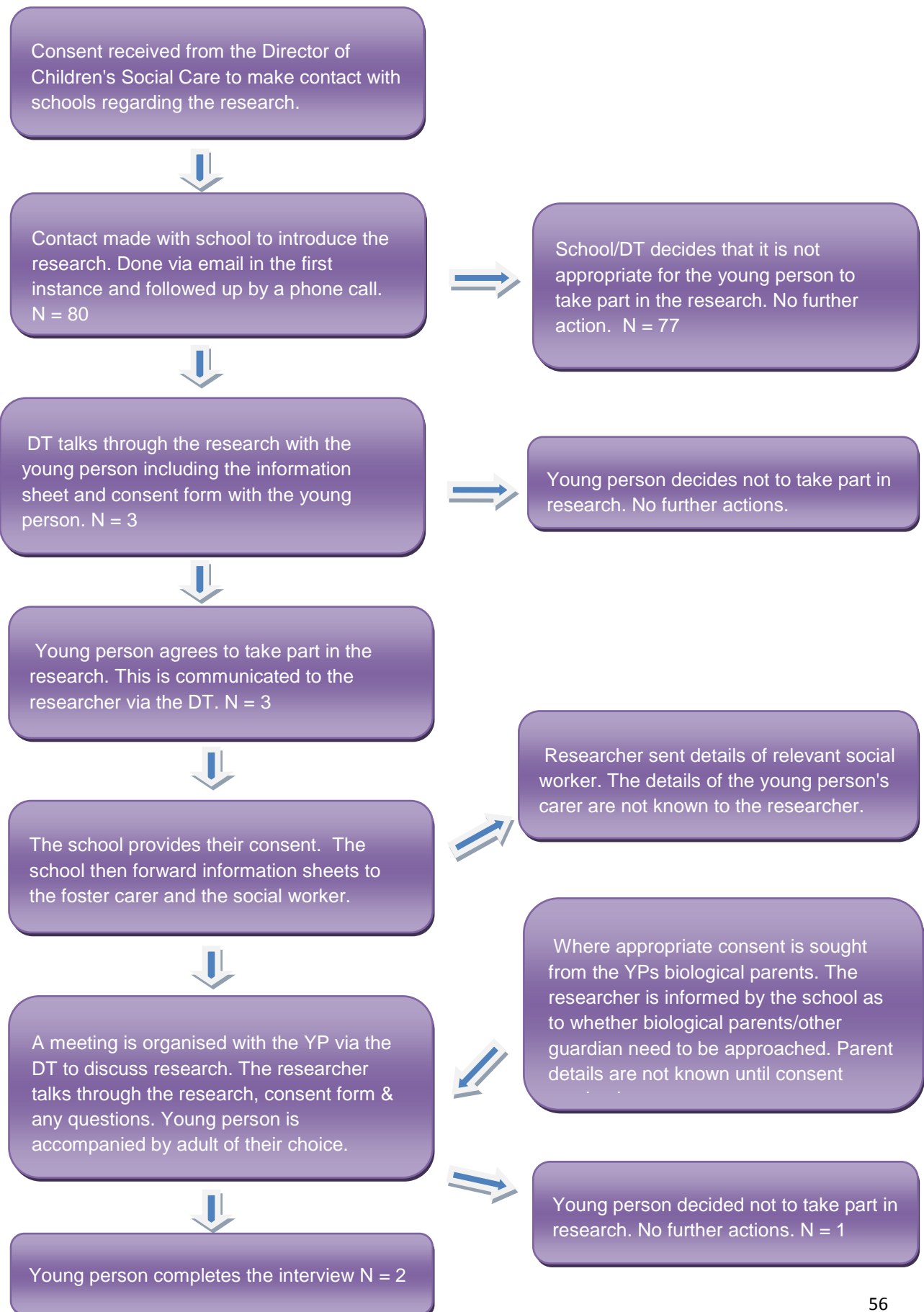
A meeting was then organised with young person via the DT to discuss research. At this meeting the young person was accompanied by an adult of their choice i.e. guardian/teacher. During the meeting the information sheet was discussed and the researcher answered any questions the young person or adult had about the research. In the cases of the young person, they were then given a further opportunity to go away and

think about whether they definitely want to take part in the research. A date for a potential interview was also set at this meeting. The young person's decision to/not to take part was communicated to the researcher via the DT before this date. The young person then completed the interview with the researcher.

The opportunity to have further reflection on whether to participate was not deemed necessary for the professionals involved in this study and once any issues had been clarified at the meeting the interview was completed. Professionals involved in the study were contacted by through their departments, for example from schools within the anonymised list and teams within the researcher's local authority.

To an extent, the participation process for the professionals involved this study mirrored that of LAC participants. Following an expression of interest from the professional (demonstrated through a response to the researcher's initial contact with their team) the researcher forwarded the information letter and consent form. This allowed for the participants to have an opportunity to fully digest the information and ask questions prior to completing an interview. A debrief immediately followed the completion of the interview.

**Figure 3: Participation Process LAC Participants**





### 3.6 DATA ANALYSIS: A RATIONALE FOR GROUNDED THEORY

The current study has utilised the GT procedures and techniques outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Corbin & Strauss (2008) employ a systematic approach to data collection and theory production and the methods of open coding, constant comparison, questioning of the data and theoretical sampling can be aligned with the concepts of conceptualisation and re-conceptualisation within the critical realist stance (Oliver, 2011). Thus the methodology of Corbin and Strauss (2008) more comfortably sits within the epistemological framework of critical realism adopted within this research.

The method of analysis was chosen following consideration of the questions and research aims of the study. Lyons and Coyle (2007) urge researchers to consider using GT when seeking to explore individuals' perceptions and experiences of the world. The researcher was drawn to GT as it was felt that this approach was well suited to the exploratory and explanatory nature of the study, and capable of illuminating the complexity of the individual experience whilst couching it within a contextual framework.

The researcher acknowledges that qualitative research is compatible with a range of methodologies. For example it would have been feasible to consider drawing on alternative forms of analysis such as Discourse Analysis (DA) or Thematic Analysis (TA) which are both capable of representing an individual's experiences of the world within a social framework however it was felt that overall these approaches did not fully align with the epistemological position underpinning this study.

Discourse Analysis sits within a social constructionist view of reality. Central to this approach is an emphasis on language being a 'constructive' tool. DA looks at language within and across contexts, and in doing so considers the power relations that can emerge, the

relationship between discourses and the social and cultural contexts they exist within. However although DA considers different views and understanding of the world (Paltridge, 2006) this approach does not explicitly acknowledge a stratified reality i.e. that reality encompasses both the individual experience-which may or may not be constructed through language-and the reality which exists beyond the individual. In addition, whilst DA is capable of highlighting the function of individual discourses it does not consider personal agency of the individual and how this may be achieved (Emerson & Frosh, 2009).

Thematic analysis is a research method which is generally considered to be free from theoretical assumptions and compatible with a variety of epistemological positions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA provides the researcher with a viable means of analysing and reporting the experiences and meanings of participants in relation to their own interpretations of reality, and is to an extent compatible with the overarching critical realist epistemology of the current study (Willig, 1999). However, the researcher felt that TA did not go 'far enough' in relation to developing our understanding the generative mechanisms at the social and psychological levels which interact and influence the educational experiences of LAC.

### 3.6.1 OVERVIEW OF GROUNDED THEORY

GT was initially introduced as a general method of inquiry, applicable to both qualitative and quantitative data, by Glaser and Strauss (1967). GT was developed in response to the dominant deductive method of mid-twentieth-century science (Oliver, 2011), however explicit efforts to make theoretical assertions which can then be tested and ratified suggest that GT can be viewed as being both inductive and deductive in its approach (Bluff, 2005).

Distinctively, theory-building in GT is intimately linked with the data and so *"it is very likely that the resultant theory will be consistent with empirical observation"* (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 547). Therefore GT can be described as a methodology of discovery which enables the

researcher to develop a substantive or formal theoretical account of a phenomenon “simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations of data” (Martin & Turner, 1986, p. 141).

While there are significant differences in how the approach has evolved under varying epistemological paradigms, resulting in GT in a variety of forms, core features of the methodology have been retained (Oliver, 2011). Primarily these core features relate to an emphasis on concurrent data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling and constant comparison, memo-writing throughout to capture the researcher's internal analytic thinking, detailed coding and analysis and critical reflexivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Oliver, 2011) all of which are touched upon in the following sections.

### 3.6.2 DATA COLLECTION IN GROUNDED THEORY USING THEORETICAL SAMPLING

The researcher has incorporated sampling methods as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). *Theoretical Sampling* is an iterative process of data collection which is based on concepts and themes generated within the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin & Strauss (2008) highlight that a distinguishing feature of this process is that theoretical sampling is not a ‘sampling of persons’ but of concepts. Since theoretical sampling is concept driven it enables researchers to explore the concepts that are relevant to the phenomenon in depth.

According to Corbin & Strauss (2008) the researcher purposely looks for indicators of concepts so that they may examine the data and discover how concepts vary under different conditions. ‘Analysis’ is thought to begin after the first day of data gathering. They stress that data collection leads to analysis, analysis leads to concepts, and concepts generate questions which lead to more data collection so that our understanding of these concepts is increased.

Therefore unlike more conventional methods of sampling, a researcher engaging in theoretical sampling does not go out and collect the entire set of data before beginning the analysis. Instead the researcher is urged to allow the analysis guide the research in an iterative manner. Hence in the present study the researcher initially completed and analysed two interviews. The analysis of these interviews led to the development of initial conceptual categories that were then pursued in subsequent interviews.

Theoretical sampling procedures have implications for how the researcher structures and conducts interviews. Once data collection begins, concepts derived from analysis take precedent over the initial interview questions. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that rigid adherence to the initial interview schedule throughout a study can hinder the researcher's capacity for discovery due to limitations placed on the amount and type of data that can be gathered. Thus within the GT approach research questions are open ended and flexible which allows theoretical understanding emerge more fluidly. They are required to be sufficiently broad to facilitate systematic inquiry of all the aspects of a phenomenon in depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As data collection and analysis progresses questions will inevitably become more refined and specific as a result of the researcher's increased awareness of the key concepts and as the researcher seeks to saturate categories (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

It is important to note, however, that not every concept that emerges from the data is sampled for. Throughout the researcher is forced to be reflexive about which categories to develop further with the aim of developing the categories or themes that are most important to the study. Whilst the direction the research takes is dependent on the nature of the data and the researcher's interpretation of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) a key factor in terms

of the validity of the research (discussed in more detail later) is that the researcher's decisions are transparent and that his reasoning can be traced.

Within this process data is continually collected until the point of *theoretical saturation*- the point at which conceptual categories can no longer be expanded upon by incoming data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). However Corbin & Strauss (2008) contend that saturation is

*"...more than a matter of no new categories or themes emerging. It also denotes a development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation, and possible relationships to other concepts. In other words, the aim of research is not just to come up with a list of categories. It is to tell us something about those categories. The understandings provided by the researcher must go beneath surface explanations" (p. 148).*

This suggests that the researcher must be careful to avoid reductionist descriptions of concepts that emerge in the study. In the researcher must endeavour to understand/explain how and when a particular concept takes on meaning, how this varies in different conditions and what the consequences or implications are. However complete development of all categories is unlikely to be achieved and the researcher has to strive for 'sufficient' development of categories and concepts. Corbin & Strauss (2008) point out that a researcher has to be practical about the limitations placed upon them such as time constraints in the current study. What is important is that for the purposes of the study the researcher has provided "considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon, and relationships to other categories have been made clear" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 149).

### 3.6.3 ANALYSIS IN GROUNDED THEORY

Analysing qualitative data is a complex process with qualitative studies generating large amounts of data which are not readily amenable to analysis and data reduction (Yin, 1984). Consequently, analysis in qualitative research requires the researcher to be systematic in

their approach. Qualitative analysis is a process which involves working with data, organising it, breaking it down, synthesising it, looking for patterns and making decisions about what aspects of the data are pertinent (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

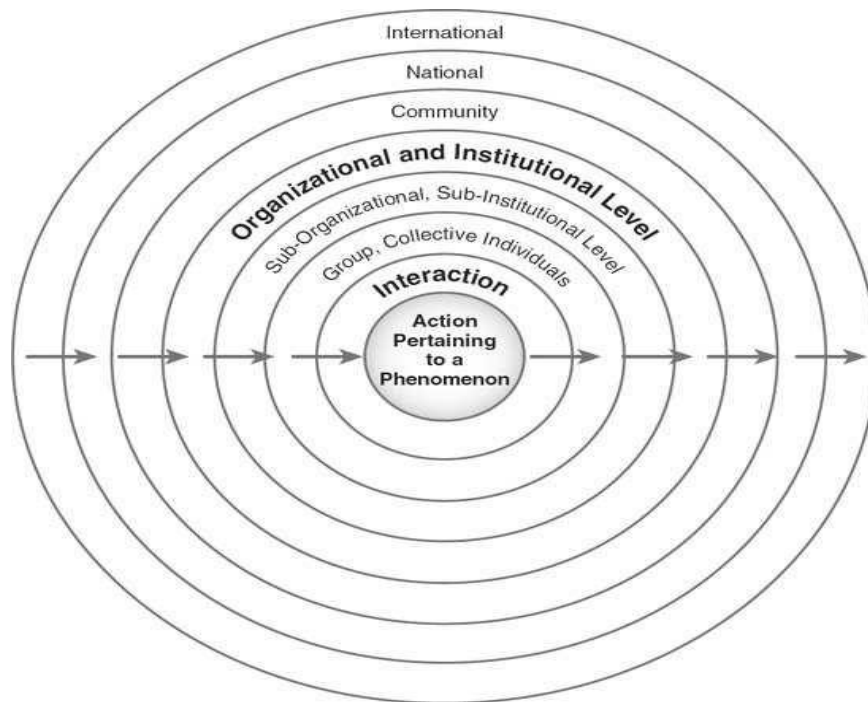
Both the paradigm and the CCM were employed in the data analysis phase of the current study they support logical and systematic thinking in relation to the data and facilitate the researcher's ability to relate the data in very complex ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Further Strauss and Corbin (1990) urge all researchers to incorporate these analytic procedures, particularly those early on in their qualitative careers, emphasising that their absence may lead to a grounded theory analyses which lacks in density and precision.

### 3.6.3.1 PARADIGM AND THE CONDITIONAL/CONSEQUENTIAL MATRIX

The *Paradigm* is a way of perceiving the data. It is a set of questions that can be applied to the data in order to facilitate the analyst in drawing out contextual features and to identify of potential relationships between context and process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin & Strauss (2008, p. 89) outline the basic components of the paradigm as understanding the conditions, actions and interactions and associated consequences.

The CCM a conceptual framework that urges the researcher to acknowledge the multiple and diverse patterns of connectivity of conceptual relationships and inter/action over time (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although the diagrammatic representation below presents these interactions as linear, there is continual and fluid movement between the layers. During analyses the researcher continually sought to understand bi-directional influences.

Figure 4: Conditional/Consequential Matrix (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 94)



### 3.6.3.2 CODING INTERVIEWS AND DEVELOPING CATEGORIES

Coding in GT is the first step of data analysis helping the researcher to move towards more abstract interpretations of the interview data (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher engaged in a detailed three-step analysis as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). The stages of analysis- *Open coding, Axial coding and Theoretical coding* - are described below:

During this first stage the researcher examined the data line-by-line to identify discrete 'chunks of data' and formed initial categories through describing the properties and dimensions of that concept. This phase acts as a starting point within the research to identify initial phenomena and produce themes and conceptual labels of significance in what Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe as "*the building blocks of theory*" (p. 101). As two or more concepts with similar properties emerged within the data, they were incorporated within a

broader conceptual category adding breadth and depth to categories, strengthening concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions. The researcher engaged in *open coding* for all of the eight interviews before 'formally' entering the *axial coding* phase.

It is important to note that whilst phases of analysis were split as the interviews were being coded the researcher's mind inevitably began to consider conceptual relationships between the emerging categories (the beginnings of axial coding). For example, the '*Academic Rigour and Respect*' sub-code (Table 3) taps into a perception that, to an extent, B-Tech courses (a vocational qualification) lack the academic rigour of other courses such as GCSEs (which this participant undertook). During early analysis this sub-code, grounded in P2's descriptions, stimulated further questions in the researcher's thinking. For example, he wanted to understand further what may have informed P2's view, whether this was solely their perception or was grounded in reality or both. Further instances within this interview and across participant interviews were examined to help ascertain this information in addition to my own knowledge and understanding of the literature. This point is also highlighted in third edition *Basics of Qualitative Research* by Corbin and Strauss (2008) who clarify that "...*open coding and axial coding go hand in hand. The distinctions made between the two types of coding are "artificial" and for explanatory purposes only...*" (p. 198). An example of *open coding* from the current study is illustrated in Table 3:



**Table 3: An Example of Open Coding Grounded in Participant Descriptions**

Open Code	Code Memo	Sub-codes	Participant Example
Which Route? Academic vs. Vocational Education	<p>There continues to be a distinction between "Academic Education" and "Vocational Education" with GCSE's, Sixth Form and University representing the former.</p> <p>I am interested here in the ways in which individuals view these as viable options for themselves and the extent to which these different types of education are perceived to meet the educational needs of LACYP. What are the perceived and real differences between academic education and vocational routes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Academic Rigour and Respect</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What does Academic Education offer?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What does Vocational Education offer?</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>"Yeah. Like a lot of my friends in a lot of their subjects they did like B-Tech and erm like they had it very easy..." P2</i></p> <p><i>"I want to be able to make money so like I don't think education is for me so like possibly an apprenticeship." P2</i></p>

The example above illustrates a developed open code in terms of its properties and dimensions. With regard to the sub-codes, originally open codes, we can see that they were subsumed within a broader and more conceptual open code as the analysis progressed. It became apparent during data analysis that the sub-codes tapped into a similar broader process of views held about and distinctions between the two educational routes but were distinct in that they described different aspects of the broader open code: *'Which Route? Academic vs. Vocational Education'*.

The memo attached to the open code sought to describe the properties and dimensions of this concept through returning to the data. It is important to note that the open code memo changed over time being continually adapted as new concepts were subsumed within them.

Axial coding is the stage of data analysis which seeks to systematically relate 'categories to sub-categories along the lines of their properties and dimensions' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The significance of this stage is the breakdown of categories (phenomena) into sub-categories which adds further depth and structure to the categories.

During the phase as the researcher began to 'develop the analytic story' emerging within the data he immersed himself within an implicit (thinking) and explicit (documenting) process of applying the research paradigm and CCM of describing when, why, who, where, how and with what consequences (See Appendix G for an example) phenomena occurred (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Connections were made across and within participant data thus forming links beyond the descriptive level and operating at more conceptual level. An example of *axial coding* and the ways in which the researcher began to understand causality within the data can be found in Appendix G and specifically relates to the 'Hearing LAC' dimension of the AEL model (see Figure 8) which is presented in the following chapter.

Theoretical coding is the most abstract stage of the coding process exploring relationships between categories. During this process the researcher sought integrate and refine his categories into a larger theoretical scheme (outlined in detail by Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which could explain and account for the various psychological and social processes present within the axial codes. This process of gradual category development and conceptual refinement culminated in the AEL explanatory model of the data and is presented in the following chapter (see Results section, Figure 6). Further, since the AEL model conceptually accounts for the processes and sub-process emerging from the analysis process it can be viewed as being grounded in the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

During the analytic process a small number of open codes lacked sufficient depth to warrant distinct conceptual categories or could not be conceptually linked to other pieces of data without having additional opportunities for exploration i.e. more data gathering. As such these inadequately developed codes are not reflected in the overall explanatory model. It is important to note that to an extent this can be viewed as part of the analytic process within GT analysis. As Corbin & Strauss (2008) highlight:

*"Sometimes the problem is not insufficient data, but an excess of data. That is, some ideas don't seem to fit the theory. These are usually extraneous concepts, nice ideas, but ones that were never developed....our advice is to drop them from the study..." (p.113)*

### 3.6.3.3 MEMO WRITING

In the current study the analytic process of coding and category development was supported by keeping memos. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) highlight:

*"Qualitative analysis involves complex and cumulative thinking that would be very difficult to keep track of without the use of memos" (p. 119)*

Thus it was essential that the researcher engaged in memo writing at all stages i.e. post-interview, during transcribing, when reading the transcripts and whilst coding the interview and during the later stages of theory development. Subsequently the memos allowed the researcher to further interrogate meanings of interviewee's statements, compare concepts identified in interview transcripts, at different stages of the research process, to each other and to the literature. Furthermore, it helped to capture the inconsistencies and consistencies within the researcher's thinking during the latter stages of the research and theoretical development.

### 3.6.3.4 MAXQDA

In the research, coding and analysis of the interview transcripts were supported through the use of MaxQDA computer package 2007. MaxQDA is a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data and is designed for both qualitative

and quantitative research (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The use of MAX QDA increases the level of transparency in the research as it establishes a process for documentation of the data collected forming an audit trail (Yardley, 2008). MAXQDA provides the opportunity to clearly present examples of the coding process and how interpretations were made.

#### 3.6.4 SUBSTANTIVE OR FORMAL THEORY?

It is important to acknowledge that within GT two types of theory development are distinguished: substantive and formal theoretical development. Substantive theories constitute a theoretical interpretation or explanation of a phenomenon within a particular area, for example developing a theory to explain and/or manage issues in a specific setting. Conversely, formal theories are more abstract and provide a significantly more complex theoretical understanding of a phenomenon which can be applied to a wider range of settings or contexts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In order to develop a formal theory Corbin & Strauss (2008) highlight that it would be necessary to apply theoretical sampling procedures to a range of relevant organizations, contexts. Charmaz (2006) points out that most grounded theory studies represent substantive theories as they focus on particular problems in a specific, substantive area. Charmaz (2006) suggests that through combining and conceptualising the results from several substantive grounded theories we are able to develop a more general formal theory. Individual substantive theory's can aid in the refinement of a final formal theory. In other words, a formal theory may relate to or 'cut across' several substantive theories. Given the nature and scope of the current study i.e. within the context of specific requirements and tight time frames of a professional doctoral thesis, it was not feasible to engage in the level of exploration, analyses and refinement processes which would result in the production of a formal theory and the researcher acknowledges that the theory produced will be at the 'substantive' phase of development.

### 3.6.5 CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Considering the validity of research involves making a judgement about the proficiency of research and whether the findings can be viewed as being 'trustworthy'. Criteria used to assess the 'rigour' of quantitative research i.e. objectivity, reliability and (statistical) generalisability (Yardley, 2008) is less applicable to qualitative research. However, assessing the rigour of qualitative research is not simply concerned with moving away from positivist terminology but about understanding how 'rigour' manifests itself in within a qualitative paradigm. Thus the expectation to demonstrate the 'validity' or rather 'trustworthiness' of qualitative research is the same although this may be addressed differently.

The researcher initially considered how the setting in which the interviews took place could impact on participant i.e. the young person may be less willing to talk openly about their experiences whilst at school. As such the young person had an option to discuss an appropriate venue for the interview to take place to ensure that they were more comfortable. As previously highlighted similar steps were undertaken to ensure that the professionals involved in this study were also able to talk openly and honestly about their experiences. Further, in order to increase the researcher's sensitivity towards participant perspectives interview questions were 'open-ended' and encouraged participants to explore what was important to them rather than the pre-occupations of the researcher (Wilkinson, Joffe, & Yardley, 2004).

According to Yardley (2008) the 'rigour' of a study can be demonstrated through the data collection procedures, the depth and breadth of analyses and an in depth engagement with the topic. Yardley (2008) indicates that respondent validation can add value to one's research. This is when the researcher 'checks-out' with the participant the 'fit' between their analysis and interpretations with the experiences of the participant. However, it was felt that

this was not appropriate for this research study due the study's emphasis on the consistencies and inconsistencies of multiple accounts rather than seeking a 'single' verifiable account (Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal & Smith, 2004).

Throughout the research process the researcher engaged in an iterative process of reflection and the researcher was mindful to not impose his own categories and meanings on the data. This was primarily achieved through 'memos' completed at all stages during the research, discussion with his supervisor and drawing on the expertise of the assistant psychologist. 'Memo writing' during the research process supports the researcher by providing a record of thoughts and ideas. As such memos enable the researcher to reflect upon ideas and thought processes arising during the research process and enter into a dialogue about the research data and therefore supported critical reflexivity within the study. Moreover, the coding methods within grounded theory - *open, selective and axial coding* - provide a systematic and analytical approach for data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and starting from an open-coding position supported an inductive exploration of the data. In addition, revisiting the data at several stages i.e. transcribing, memos, coding, theorising, refining and to an extent writing up the thesis were also key points within the process in which the researcher reflected upon his ideas and the extent to which the explanatory model reflected the observed data.

Acting as a final measure, the first two anonymised interviews were coded separately by both the researcher and the Assistant Psychologist in the service. This was followed by in-depth discussions of the codes and memos. Due to time constraints, the remaining interviews were accompanied by discussions of the researcher's coding. These steps helped to ratify the researcher's reasoning in terms of interpretive legitimacy, further contributed to the transparency of the study and helped to ensure that analysis remained inductive in its approach. For example, during the analytic process the researcher became aware that his

training in psychology could at times shape the ways in which he viewed or interpreted the data. Through having access to an open discussion with the Assistant Psychologist, who could act as a 'critical friend', the researcher was able to reflect upon the ways in which his psychological inclination could potentially influence his understanding of the data and guard against this.

### 3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research was conducted on behalf of the researcher's Educational Psychology Service and was funded and organised by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. The study was guided by the principles outlined in the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014). The researcher familiarised himself with, and adhered to LA policies and procedures relating to LAC throughout the research. In addition this study was reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SREC), a national research ethics committee, prior to commencing the research.

In order to generate high quality data it was important that participant's were able to speak openly and honestly about their experiences. At times this may be challenging when, for example, having access to specific details about the individual participants make it easy for the reader to identify the individual participating in the study. Due to the nature of this particular study, completed within a single local authority context where staff potentially may be more easily identified by their peers, the decision was taken to minimise the information provided about the participants. This means that the current study has not included, for example, the age, gender or years of experience of the professional participants involved in the study. Further details of the ethical consideration in this study can be found in Appendix J.

### 3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Details of the researcher's philosophical orientation, methodology employed and issues concerning the validity of this study have all been addressed by this chapter. In the following chapter the researcher presents a detailed analysis of data collected and the overarching theoretical model developed which conceptually accounts for the emergent data.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### 4.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The purpose of the current study was to develop a '*substantive theory*' as to the contexts and mechanisms which enable or impede the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4. In-depth analysis and triangulation of participant experiences, inherent within GT, enabled the researcher to hypothesise and establish explanatory models concerning the facilitators and barriers of academic progress. The previous chapters introduced the topic area, the study's rationale and outlined the researcher's justification for utilising GT. The current chapter provides a detailed presentation of the research findings derived from the GT data analysis. The researcher begins by outlining the theoretical scheme: *Availability to Engage in Learning (AEL)* which represents the interactions between and intersections of the emergent categories in the data and is the overarching theoretical understanding of the data. Finally, the facilitative and inhibitive mechanisms which impact on LAC's AEL are presented. Throughout this chapter, the findings presented will be grounded in the descriptions of the participants. Some parts of the descriptions will be placed in bold to help further illustrate key points within the description. To protect the anonymity of the participants in this study they are referred to as Participant 'X' [Young Person] or Participant 'X' [Professional].

### 4.2 AVAILABILITY TO ENGAGE IN LEARNING

The researcher developed the overarching explanatory process of *Availability to Engage in Learning* as it was felt that this best captured the analytic story of the data. In line with the research question, the researcher then identified core categories which facilitated or inhibited this overarching process. Once the overarching theoretical explanation of the analytic story was developed the interrelated processes were placed in a critical realist Context, Mechanism Outcome framework (please see Discussion for 'facilitative' and

'inhibitory' CMO diagrams and explanations). As a result of the in-depth analytic process undertaken (See Chapter 3) the emergent theoretical scheme along with the associated facilitators and barriers are grounded in the accounts of the participants.

*Availability to Engage in Learning* concerns the young person's psychological and emotional availability to participate in learning. It reflects the dynamic interaction between the individual coping mechanisms and aspirations of the young person and the contextual mechanisms and factors which vary in both their intensity and duration, over time.

The concept of being 'Available' reflects the young person's internal state in terms of the degree to which they are able to participate in the learning process with respect to their psychological and emotional availability and moves beyond a simplistic dichotomy of a child being 'available to learn' or 'not available to learn'. Instead a child or young person may be able to participate in learning to a greater or lesser extent both between and within the same context.

'Engagement' acknowledges that learning, including within an educational context, is not a passive endeavour and draws upon the significant resources within the young person. It is the interaction between these inner resources and learning within a given context which accounts for the variation and individual differences between LAC since the individual capacities and inner resources differ between children and young people. The example below helps to illustrate how a young person's psychological and emotional availability impacts upon their 'participation' in the learning process in the classroom. In the example we see that Participant 1's 'presence in the classroom' is conceptually distinct from 'participation in the class' and 'learning':

*"...because I spent so much time on erm **developing my emotions a long with my age**, I'm still catching up, you know. That I kind of, you know, Year 10, for the **first four months my head was still on the table** or **I would sleep** or **I would just ignore**. So **learning was incredibly difficult**."*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

In this example we see that the young person is 'present' in the classroom however her engagement in the learning process for the first four months was limited to her 'head being on the table'. Participant 1 also explains that one of the contributing factors was her emotional availability at the time.

The researcher has adopted the term 'Learning' over 'Education' because the term is more able to capture the idea that the young person is engaged in learning in all aspects of their development. Learning is a life process; it occurs in all aspects of the young person's life i.e. their relationships with peers and school staff, their education, their understanding of the world around them and does not end at KS4:

*"I will admit every young person is confused, because we're discovering things in the world, **every day we are learning something** new, and **we will continue that into adulthood...**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

Figure 5: Explanatory Model of AEL

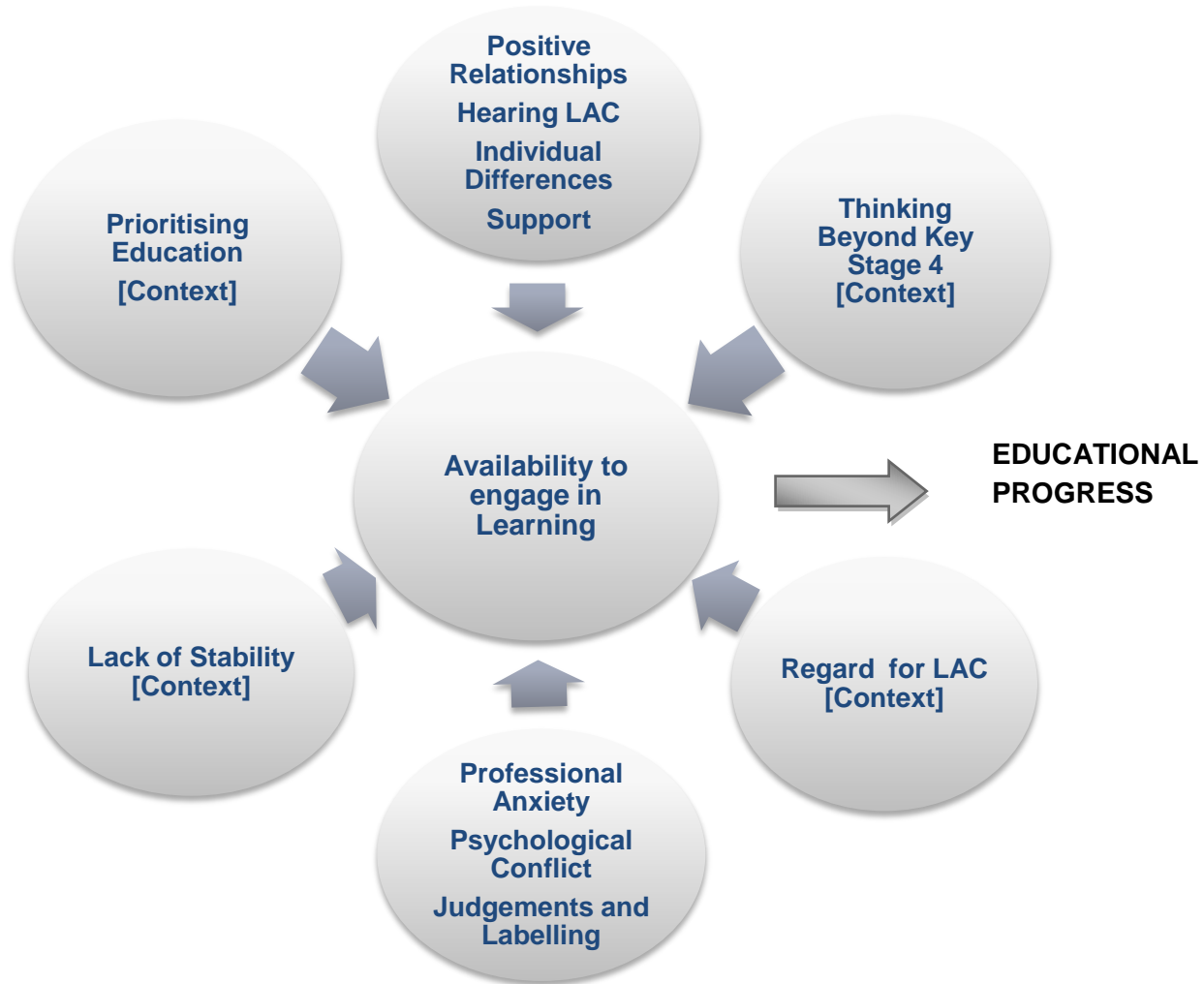


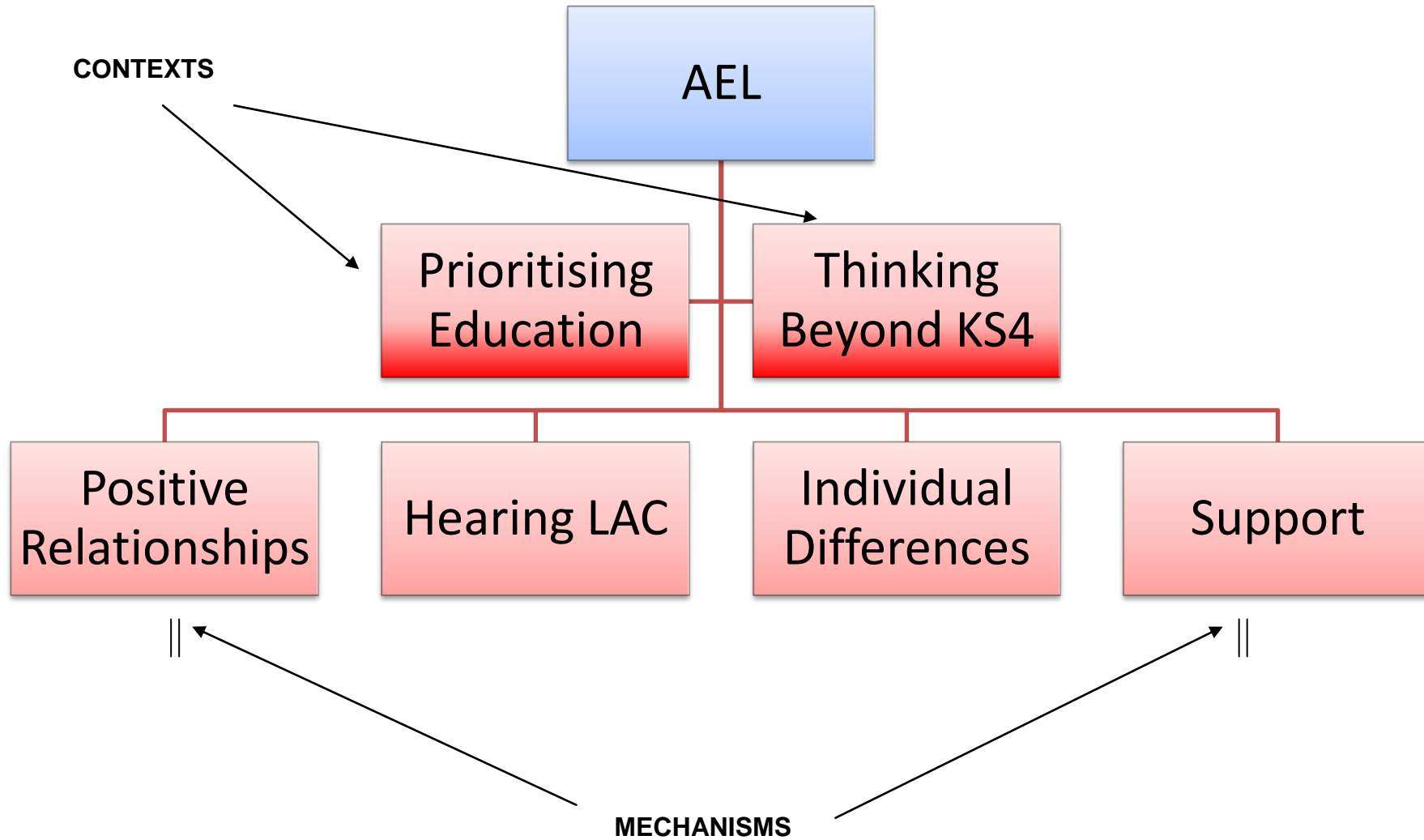
Figure 5 displays 7 mechanisms operating within four contexts which impact on the LAC's AEL. These mechanisms, interacting within contextual processes, impact on AEL and subsequently have implications for the educational progress of LAC.

In the following sections the researcher separates out the emergent contexts and mechanisms according to whether they support or inhibit LAC's AEL. The researcher will present the facilitative contexts and mechanisms first followed by the inhibitive contexts and mechanisms.

### 4.3 WHAT FACILITATES PROGRESS

Before presenting the mechanisms which facilitate AEL, it is important to outline the contextual factors within which these mechanisms operate. Contextual factors reflect the ways in which participants in the study attributed causality to organisational or contextual conditions. Facilitative contexts and mechanisms are displayed in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Facilitative Contexts and Mechanisms of AEL



### 4.3.1 PRIORITISING EDUCATION

'Prioritising Education' emerged as a primary contextual factor, emerging from participant descriptions, which facilitated the educational progress of LAC. A facilitative context appeared to be which had prioritised LAC education through having a strong commitment to support LAC and understand their educational needs. This applied to all professionals working with the young person, the young person themselves, their foster carers, and groups and organisational contexts having a culture and ethos which held commitment to LAC and their engagement in education at the centre of their work:

*"I think also what made it work so well was that the **school was just committed to the young person and pulled out every stop to support this young person.**"*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

*"For example, **many of our schools do not have governors who are constantly asking and asking for feedback about looked after children...every school should be having a looked after child policies, this is about the ethos of the school and the culture of the school, and they need a policy which says our ethos is to support these children, because it needs to come from the very top.**"*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

*"...foster carers **more needs to be demanded of them too in this whole educational success thing.**"*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

Prioritising education was also underpinned by professionals having high educational expectations for the young person. Having high expectations of the young person meant being able to understand that LAC children can achieve despite previous experiences of adversity. There will be individual differences, and it was noted that LAC can be high flying students and, with respect to teaching and learning, we need to be mindful that we are stretching them academically. Further, it was also important to note that expectations was

based on having an individual understanding of that young person i.e. where they are at the moment and making sure that they are making progress in relation to their own ability:

***" I have high expectations for all my looked after children and I want them all to do well and I kind of think that if they, if what they came in with, if they get that or better, then I have done my job."***

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

***"But so for instance those children who have been high flyers there's been a couple of instances, I mean teachers have been supportive but it's been at a push to say that okay this child, if you're able to put this support in this child will be able to get this, that, that and that. So it's about you know kind of being able to push the school to be able to put the right support in so that they can stretch, if that makes sense."***

*Participant 6 [Professional]*

***"Erm it's not always according to the progress of the rest of the class it's according to their ability and about what they are actually able to achieve."***

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

Finally, understanding the 'competing priorities' faced by social workers and educational professionals face within their roles can help to support the education of LAC. For social workers conflicting priorities related to a perception that the safety and emotional needs of the young person were sometimes prioritised at the expense of the young person's educational needs:

***"No it's not a priority. Safeguarding to them [Social care], therapy, and that kind of thing is to them is the priority you know a safe placement. Now the DFE statutory guidance is really clear that education needs to be on a par with this, but it's not being listened to, it's not being taken on board."***

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

Whilst there appeared to be a degree of accuracy in Participant 7 perspective the situation appears to be more nuanced. Education is viewed as being something which is additional to the role of the social worker:



**"...so it involves extra work for us we have to be deeply involved in their care and pay particular attention to their education to help them achieve [the] maximum."**

*Participant 5 [Professional]*

However, in this description we can see that education is for this social worker is valued and is something which particular attention needs to be paid. The researcher also noted a perception that 'education' operated slightly out of the primary remit of social workers. It appears that this may be underpinned by the recognition that there are other professionals for whom this is the primary focus and area of expertise:

**"And then I'm not an educationalist, I'm not really a professional [educational professional], I do consult people here and share with them what I see and what I feel."**

*Participant 5 [Professional]*

#### 4.3.2 THINKING BEYOND KEY STAGE 4

**"...there are no quick answers here, in three years she was practically on a par with her peers more or less and dreaming of the future. Whereas before there was just a black hole."**

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

'Thinking beyond Key Stage 4' acknowledges that there may not always be quick or simple solutions available and it is important to hold a long term view in mind with regards to progress. It also considers the 'timing' of difficulties emerging, for example, during Year 10 and Year 11 and relates not only to the young person's entry into care, but also considers timing of a potential breakdown of the family unit (pre-care) or breakdown of the care placement. For the participants in the study both experienced significant challenges in the middle of their GCSE studies:

**"So I came into foster [care] when I was just finishing Year 10"**

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

*"I didn't continue it my whole sort of school sort of time because **I left school a bit early [during year 11] for personal reasons.**"*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

The timing at which a young person enters care was believed to impact on their educational outcomes. Instances in the data suggested that this could be both positive and negative:

*"...and the whole of **Year 11 last year I was actually in foster, [Foster Care]** so I had that support so I came out really **happy** with what I got... **Year 11 was a better time for me...**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

*"...by the time they come into care then, **by the age of 13, 14, and 15.** And **there is very little we can do then to turn them around for Year 11,** which in this country is a key demarcation, it's a key time of assessment, right, **and great judgements are made.**"*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

Whilst it was important to have high educational expectations for all LAC it is also important to 'hold in mind' a long term educational plan for the young person which accounts for progress over time. LAC can sometimes be developmentally behind their chronological age which can have implications for their preparedness at the time of taking their GCSE exams. Therefore a package of support which considers the longer term educational trajectory of the young person can be helpful. LAC can still achieve successful outcomes if support is continued:

*"My experience however, has shown me that if we **continue with the support of children who have not succeeded at KS4 we can eventually pull them around as they get older...**We know that LAC often do not develop on a line with their peers and that **developmentally they can be two years, up to two years behind their chronological age**"*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

In addition, the notion that 'academic' education represented or was synonymous with 'success' emerged within the data. This was considered within the context of the young person's 'long term educational plan' because it linked to the ways in which both LAC and professionals believed constituted 'successful' education in terms of the educational

trajectories of LAC. For example there was an idea that going to university was the 'goal' to aspire towards:

*"...you know it would be great to identify them a little earlier, say, when they're in Year 9 and send out packs in Year 9 saying look **these are your options when you leave school this is what you can start thinking about...you know university is never out of reach for you.**"*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

It is important to maintain high expectations for LAC in terms of educational outcomes, however what is striking about this description is that 'university' appears to have been constructed as being the most successful outcome instead of university being one option of many successful outcomes for the young person. The researcher noted that a possible consequence of having a limited construct of personal and educational achievement or success can have a negative impact on the options 'outside' of this route. For example, there were instances in the data which suggest that vocational choices are explored when mainstream education is 'not working out' for the young person.

*"So it involves explaining options, options in education, options in training, options in maybe apprenticeship, if they are **having problems with the mainstream school...**"*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

What this possibly communicates is that vocational education is a second tier choice and not one which you pursue because it is an area of identified strength. Further, in relation to the educational trajectory of the young person the perceived imbalance between 'academic' and 'vocational' education can also be linked to negative perceptions with regards to the academic rigour, respect and value (from employers) of vocational alternatives:

*"If you do a **B-Tech in a subject which you should probably do a GCSE in like B-Tech Science** yeah... erm like **everyone looks down on that** because it's basic."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

### 4.3.3 FACILITATIVE MECHANISMS

Taking into account the contextual conditions within which these social processes occur, the detailed analysis of the participant's interviews gave rise to four facilitatory mechanisms: '*Positive Relationships*', '*Hearing LAC*', '*Individual Differences*' and '*Support*'. The dimensions of these mechanisms will now be presented before considering the inhibitive contexts and mechanisms.

### 4.3.4 POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

*Researcher:*

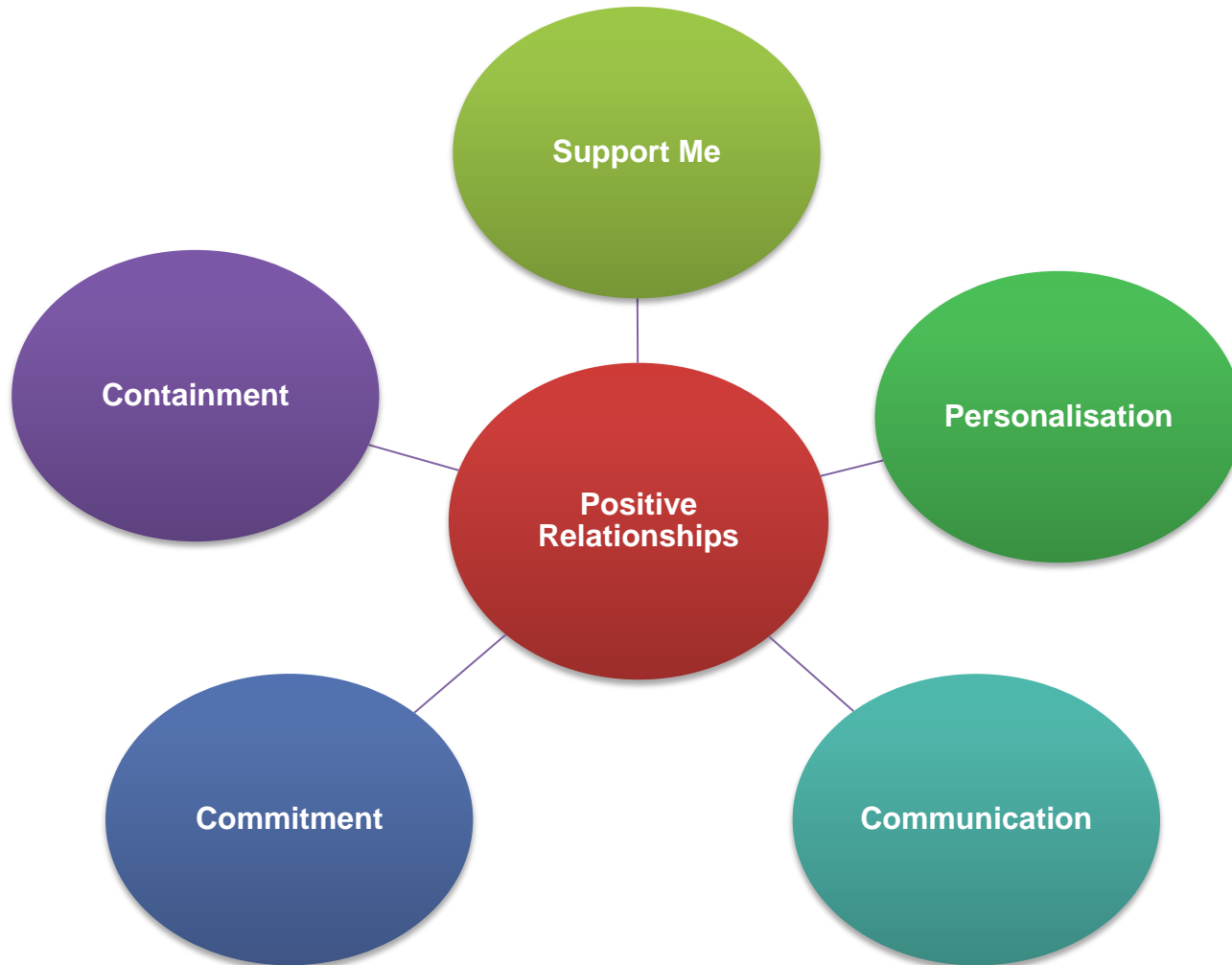
*And overall what would you say **has supported your education the most?***

*Participant 2 [Young Person]:*

*Staff Member A is a really good support...I mean **Staff Member A is just amazing, I don't what I would have done without her really...yeah I think this is the best support.***

'Positive relationship' refers to the relationships formed between the young person and individuals in their immediate circle which includes staff, professionals and peers. Participants in the study, including the young people themselves, implicitly and explicitly referred to relationships as being a key facilitator of the educational progress of LAC. As the researcher refined his analysis the following dimensions of what a positive relationship 'looked like' emerged: '*Support me*', '*Personalisation*', '*Communication*', '*Commitment*' and '*Containment*' (see Figure 6). It is important to note that whilst these dimensions may manifest differently in 'peer' and 'adult' relationships they were integral to both.

Figure 7: Dimensions of 'Positive Relationships'



#### 4.3.4.1 SUPPORT ME

A key aspect of a positive relationship between the young person and their peers or an adult i.e. their social worker, teacher or their foster carer, was the process of supporting the young person and at times included advocating for the young person and putting effort into the young person. In other words it reflects instances in the data where adults or peers 'positively acted on behalf of' 'fought the corner of' or 'looked out for' the young person:

*"But for me, for her **it not just a job, it is a lifestyle** it is a vocation and **she's devoted a lot of time to me...**"*

*Participant 1 [Young person]*

*"...**these girls would come and see me at break-time and see that I'm okay...Like they'd tell me off if I like got kicked out of class they'd be like 'no, don't do that...blah blah blah' coz they were just looking out for me.**"*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

*"He said [LACY] when you met me last week I listened to you very carefully and I trusted what you were saying **now I see you fought on my behalf you know and you got me back** to school I will always follow what you say I will always have good attendance **I will always be a good student from now on.**"*

*Participant 5 [Professional]*

#### 4.3.4.2 PERSONALISATION

Being viewed as an individual was seen as being both as a necessity and viewed as being a mechanism which would facilitate the relationship between the young person and the other person. This was achieved through showing an interest in the young person, seeing the young person as an individual and being more personal:

*"I think a good service, in a good team, **your professional knows the child and more importantly the child knows the professional** so that there's consistency, a bit like the social worker, **they need to know that person.**"*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

*"Like I don't like my social worker and I feel like we would get on better, like if he was able to talk to me on a more personal level and say 'I know this is upsetting for you...' or erm I don't know just something more personal rather than just talking as an official, like, obviously I know if that person is taking care of me, like, if I am in social services care, I would like them to be a bit more personal."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

*"I can come in here and talk to 'Staff Member A' about a problem and there's other people like 'Staff Member B' from the 'Project.' I can come in and just say 'yeah, I've had a really bad day or this happened' and they'll be like 'oh that's good I'm pleased for you'..."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

#### 4.3.4.3 COMMUNICATION

Participants viewed good communication as an integral feature of facilitating a positive relationship and included the young person feeling confident enough to talk openly about what they were thinking and feeling in terms of expressing their views. In addition, being able to repair a situation was viewed in this study as being a dimension of having open communication but also strongly linked with being in a containing relationship. That is, a pre-requisite for repair was that the young person felt safe and secure in the relationship and serves to illustrate the interrelatedness between the properties and dimensions of developing a positive relationship. 'Being able to repair a situation' relates to the idea of the young person having opportunities to fix things if they go wrong and that making mistakes is 'not the end of the world' and models to the young person that, as with Participant 2 below, it is "possible to work round stuff":

*"Like, there have been things, like even on my work placement, I missed a day because I was sick but I was too scared to ring in that I was sick coz it was only my second day...I came in the next day and saw Staff Member A and she was like 'ah what happened' and I was like 'I got scared to ring in' and she said 'look, you know what, we can work through this'... you know, and we were just able to you know work round stuff."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

#### 4.3.4.4 COMMITMENT TO THE YOUNG PERSON

'Commitment to the young person' concerns effort or action which communicate to the young person a genuine interest in their wellbeing. This primarily occurred in relation to the professional-young person relationship, but was also observed in peer relationships:

*"...erm they'd come and sit on my table coz they'd always see that I was sitting by myself and, um, they'd come sit at my table and **be like 'oh are you okay,' you know they didn't have to they could've sat anywhere else....and they were really nice...And they just sort of, like, took me under their wing...And erm, yeah, I think that was a good experience for me.**"*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

Commitment to the young person was not limited to direct displays towards the young person. In addition to working directly with the young person being willing to learn new skills in order to be better at your role, attending meeting or trainings and working collaboratively with other professionals were all identified in the study as being ways in which professionals could display their commitment to the young person. This is exemplified in the following example which illustrates some of the steps taken 'behind the scenes' to support the young person and could be linked to their educational progress:

*"...And she [Foster Carer] took it very seriously and she came and she was trained and thereafter she took this on and she read every day with the child and they used to discuss the books. And what she did, now this foster carer had her own children, **you know she put the time into this young lady...And the child's reading age went up and up and up from reading with her every day.**"*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

A dimension of commitment, within the context of professional-young person relationships, included showing that you could 'persevere' with the young person:



*"But I would show that that patience and that persistence you know, and again it's underpinned by a seventh theory you see, Rogers client centred approach; **empathy, congruence, unconditional positive regard**, so that is what I applied, yes, trying, anytime he had something to say I **gave him a listening ear, yes, I showed an interest** in [him] you know..."*

*Participant 3 [Young Person]*

In the study a noted positive outcome of persevering with the young person and feeling contained was that it helped the young person's emotional progress:

*"So at the beginning I sort of rebelled against their efforts to make me let them in. But after actually, **kind of, slowly, slowly but surely they actually helped me to trust again** but only trust so much."*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

*"Because you know **she's doing she's doing her very best to...not mend me as such but help me mend myself**, she also feels it when I'm upset and when I'm hurt about something."*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

#### 4.3.4.5 CONTAIN ME

'Contain me' reflects the process by which the young person begins to understand and respect the boundaries and expectations within the relationship enabling the young person to feel of safe and secure. Feeling safe and secure, particularly within the young person's foster care placement was explicitly acknowledged within the current study as being directly linked to positive educational outcomes for the young person:

*"Because if a young person **is in a placement where they feel safe, secure and loved** and you know like you mean something within that placement then **they will get back on track at school** you know but **until things are settled with the young person's placement I think we might be having more of a rocky period** for the young person at the school...that's just one example."*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

Having boundaries and clear expectation facilitated a containing relationship because of the stability it provided to the young person. For one young person in the study the need for boundaries for their own stability was explicitly acknowledged:

*"at the beginning, when I entered foster care, I said '**look I need boundaries, yes I'm old enough that I have my own self-discipline, I have my own...I know right from wrong but at the same time I do need some boundaries**' I said to them look '**I've just come from no boundaries whatsoever**'... I won't like them in the beginning but **I'll need them in the beginning for stabilit...my own stability...**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

It emerged within the study that for boundaries to be effective they need to be implemented in negotiation with the young person. This could be in the form of shared responsibilities and ultimately it served to provide the young person with a sense of control and ownership of the task:

*"Okay, so next steps, **I have some responsibility he also has some responsibility, so we agree** – okay let me contact 'XXXX', set up an interview for you **but you'll have to go there yourself or if you can't go there yourself you can go with your learning mentor...**"*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

It was also observed in the study that a facilitative mechanism of being able to effectively implement boundaries rested on the personal relationship or connection between the professional and the young person i.e. in the presence of a positive relationship the young person may more likely to respect the boundaries in place:

*"And if, like, **if we got on better I'd have more respect for him and if he said I couldn't stay out, I wouldn't stay out, but I have no respect for him because I think he's rude and mean. So therefore it does cause me to act out.**"*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

#### 4.3.5 HEARING LAC

*"...if they [the young person] need certain things and they are feeling certain ways and **we are not listening to them how can we then expect them to perform in the best way possible** to make sure they are coming into school every day, to be engaged to take their exams, **it's all got to be down to that young person, that young person is really important to us and we have to listen to them.**"*

*Participant 8 [Professional]*

'Hearing the young person' emerged as a facilitative factor as a result of the differing ways in which the 'presence' or the 'absence' of the young person's views could be linked to their educational progress. Involving and being responsive to the views of the young person in decision making facilitates their sense of 'personal agency' encouraging the young person to take ownership of their educational trajectory and thus acting to facilitate their educational engagement. The properties and dimensions of this facilitative mechanism are outlined below:

Figure 8: Dimensions of 'Hearing LAC'



#### 4.3.5.1 COMMITMENT TO ELICIT VIEWS

This dimension refers to the emphasis placed upon, and the ways in which, professionals/adults draw upon the voice of the young person to facilitate their progress. Professionals in the study commented upon the significance of having strong commitment to capture the voice of the young person and to hear their views about how they could be best supported. Commitment could be linked to the emergence of several structured opportunities for the young person's voice to be captured i.e. through structured discussions with professionals, through being a member of the local authority's young person panel (for children in care), through providing feedback to the local authority (who collects such data) and most notably through the young person's Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting. Significantly, however, it was apparent within the data that in itself a commitment to elicit the views of the young person did not always result in the young person feeling listened to.

#### 4.3.5.2 EXPRESSING VIEWS

When obtaining the views of the young person it was important to consider both the individual capacities of the young person i.e. their degree of confidence and coping skills in relation to the demands of the context:

***"It can be overwhelming in the presence of a lot of adults, it can be overwhelming but some young people they are confident they don't mind – they say what's on their mind."***

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

Having an understanding of the individual differences in relation to the demands of the context meant that the young person's contribution to, for example, a PEP meeting, could be facilitated more effectively. In practice this translated into the young person having additional support from an adult, for example, having an opportunity to discuss their views in a more

private space followed by these views being shared with professionals at the meeting or through having advocate in the meeting:

*"If they can have **maybe a one to one session with the independent reviewing officer that's private, confidential**, they can say then, or **if they can have an advocate**, somebody who will listen to them and then express their views for them...."*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

#### 4.3.5.3 INVOLVEMENT IN DECISIONS

Whilst there are structured opportunities to elicit the views of LAC it was within the context of 'relationships' and 'decision making' that appeared to link to whether the young person felt heard or not:

*"Like I have said that I wanna change social worker erm I've said that to my mum but my mum just said 'oh you're just being silly'. So I think erm a lot of people just don't take me seriously about it but like um I really don't like him."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

The researcher acknowledges that all views of young people may not translate into action however what is important in this description from Participant 2, particularly from a critical realist standpoint, is the 'young person's perspective' of not feeling listened to or 'taken seriously'. Feeling listened to could be facilitated if the young person felt like they were being taken seriously and in turn this was facilitated by having open communication with the young person about the decision making process. It was noted that whilst there are opportunities for young people to express their views it is equally important for professionals to provide the young person with explanations concerning any decisions taken:

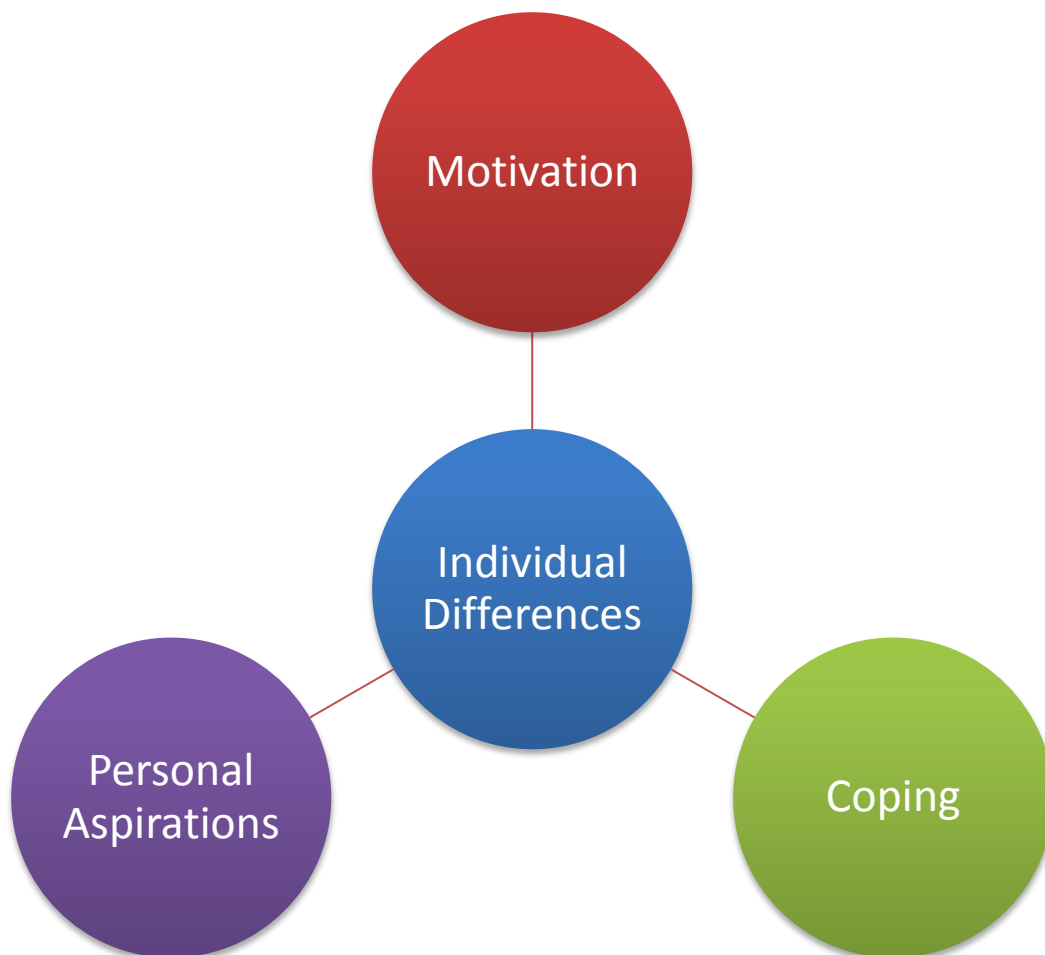
*"I think it's about trying to take their views on board but also trying to explain to them why things have happened because I think a lot of information we get back from our care leavers is that **decisions happen without anyone really telling them why they happened...**"*

*Participant 6 [Professional]*

#### 4.3.6 INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

'Individual Differences' refers to points within participant accounts which describe and attribute causality (partial or complete) to the individual qualities of the young person. The specific within child processes identified were: *'Motivation'*, *'Coping'*, *'Personal aspirations'* and are displayed in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Dimensions of 'Individual Differences'**



#### 4.3.6.1 MOTIVATION

In the current study 'Motivation' was impacted by the pupil's interest in the subject and the degree to which it linked to their personal aspirations. In addition, a deterioration of motivation as a result of difficulties experienced outside of school can negatively impact on the 'rate' of progress. It was also impacted by the external influences such as having difficulties in their home life:

*"I used to get like really bored. My teacher's would be like 'oh, you need to go home, you need to revise' and I would sit there and look at my books and be like 'I don't want to do this, this is boring.' I like had no motivation to do it, I was like I don't see like how if I read the book like 10 times it's gonna stick, coz it's not gonna stick coz I find it boring."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

*"I struggled from Year 9 when GCSE's started **due to home life and my grades deteriorated. My motivation deteriorated...**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

In the current study, a lack of motivation linked to negative outcomes in terms of how hard the young person tried and could subsequently lead to the young person having regrets about their education.

*"To be honest **I didn't really take them seriously.** I know I should have done but I knew that I hadn't listened in class. **Like I knew that I wasn't like dumb or anything like... I knew that I am still quite intelligent but I hadn't actually listened so I just sort of like acted I didn't really care and so obviously people got a lot better grades than me"***

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

#### 4.3.6.2 COPING

There were also examples from participants where potential difficulties in terms of educational progress were linked to the young person's inability to cope within a specific context:

*"...there are numerous erm instances [when] **they cannot cope with the environment and they are lagging behind their peers and they cannot really achieve as much as their peers can and they cannot really cope with the school environment.**"*



*Participant 5 [Professional]*

***"...one of the children has now been referred for alternative education because they couldn't cope in a mainstream school."***

*Participant 8 [Professional]*

The ways in which 'coping' was perceived differed among participants. This was due to participants attributing causality to either the young person i.e. believing that it was the down to the young person have emotional needs that were too significant for the school to meet. .For example, with regards to the above statements, causality for success within a mainstream environment more generally, and in case of Participant 8, the young person's move to alternative provision, has been attributed to the 'young person's' inability to cope with the demands of a mainstream environment. At other times the ability to 'cope' was attributed to the professional, foster care or school needing further support. As we see in the descriptions below the success of the school placement is attributed to the schools ability to manage:

***"...Now, they will say that this is because that child has got social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, that's why, but that's not always the case. We know that even children with such difficulties can be very bright and can do very well with the right support."***

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

***"...sometimes even when schools are feeling supported because you know if the school knows that things are happening outside of school and we let them know then they can put the support in place."***

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

In these descriptions the researcher noticed that it is the perceived coping mechanisms of the school more than the difficulties presented by the young person which influences subsequent decision making and outcomes for the young person.

#### 4.3.6.3 DEVELOPING PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

*Researcher:*

*Looking back how would you have liked things to be different?*

*Participant 2:*

*I don't know because when I left school I still didn't know what I wanted to do...I **could have got an A\* in every subject but I still didn't know what I wanted to do.** I've only know what I want to do just since last year. And erm...yeah **so like I don't think anything would be different coz like, I wouldn't know what to do...I could start doing a subject but then be like I don't like it because I'm not really sure what I'm into. So I think the most important thing for me is trying different things.***

Developing personal aspirations emerged as a category within the study as a result of the observed intersections between the young person's aspirations and their subsequent motivation and engagement with learning. Participants in the study described the significance and importance of LAC having a personal construct of their future and the impact of not having one or having a less clear construct of one. This could relate to both their future aspirations i.e. what they wanted to do in a few years time or their emotional future i.e. being in a better emotional space. Having a clear personal construct of what they wanted from their future, and perhaps more importantly having an understanding of how they may obtain it, could be linked to positive outcomes for the young person, for example, in terms of their engagement with learning and being able to make decisions and commit to ones choices:

*"...because **once you know who you are, it doesn't become a difficulty you see, framing or making a decision, you see you can make decisions and commit to those decisions because you know that you are walking in your purpose.**"*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

Having aspirations reflects the interaction between both within child and environmental factors. That is the dynamic between the individual differences in LAC in terms of their personal aspirations and the extent to which these are engendered by their environment and the professional network around them. The curriculum was viewed as presenting an

opportunity in which learning could be effectively linked to the future aspirations of young people. For example linking and exploring the applicability of academic subject matter to real world opportunities:

*"For example, with Science we didn't look at **that you can go into like forensic science, you could be a chemist**. We didn't look sort of into the different job roles. And **I think that's really, really important**".*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

There were also instances in the data where professionals tried to cultivate the young person's aspirations as a strategy to support their educational progress. When successfully implemented it could be positively linked to the young person's sense of self, future motivation and expectations:

*"And I got to know this YP personally because we took her on **residential trips and we did exercises on imagining your future**. Where would you like to be what would you like to do? So first of you begin with 'I don't want to do anything, I can't do this, I don't want to do that' and then sort of changing her ideas and **raising her expectations and her aspirations** saying 'yes you can'..."*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

Poorly developed constructs of personal aspiration appeared to be influenced by an inability or difficulty, on the part of the young person, to think beyond the relative 'here and now' which was influenced by the young person's ability to process difficult and painful emotional experiences from their past:

*"They have **no concept of future...everything is here, now**. So I work with them around helping them **to begin to think about their future**"*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

*"So in education I'm **slowly coming back into myself, who I want to be** and slowly but surely I'm **destroying the barriers that is previous emotions...For me [it's] the only way I can move forward...coz there's no point really in worrying about the past...For me the only way I can live in the present and start to move forward is by letting go of emotions from the past.**"*

Participant 1 [Young Person]

Self-awareness, as a sub-construct of aspiration, was explicitly acknowledged by participants in the study as facilitating educational engagement:

*Researcher:*

*What you think is the **most important part of your role?***

*Participant 3:*

***It's about aspiration**, because aspiration, or let me rephrase it, the most important thing to me is to help these young people to discover themselves. **Self-awareness; that's the most important thing; self-awareness...self-awareness is the first step towards discovering your pathway in life...***

Another participant stated:

*"I would say not...I would say erm **not knowing what I want to do has been a barrier** because **it means I couldn't really pursue anything at length**. So like **I'd start something and then I'd get bored and finish because I wasn't genuinely interested in it**. So I would say me myself **not knowing what I wanted to do has really not helped**. **Erm I think that's like the biggest barrier of all.**"*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

Self awareness was viewed as a dimension of 'personal aspirations' in that as young people became more self-aware they were in a better position to construct a future goal and in turn develop their personal aspiration. This was also observed to have positive implications for learning:

*"...I'm coming into my own and that is **making learning better** because I am starting to realise **what I want to do and how I want to do it.**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

### 4.3.7 SUPPORT

The concept of 'Support' was found to have the following dimensions: 'receiving support', 'providing support: professionals' (See Figure 10)

**Figure 10: Dimensions of 'Support'**



### 4.3.7.1 RECEIVING SUPPORT

This particular dimension of 'support' concerned the ways in which individuals either felt 'supported' or 'unsupported', how this related to the education of the young person, and applied to both young people and professionals although being conceptually distinct. The efficacy of the support available to the young person, within an educational setting, could be linked to the young person having access to, knowing about and forming a relationship with a significant member of staff/professional/adult:

*"And so Staff member C referred me to 'Staff Member A' and like yeah... 'Staff Member A' was able to help me, she's put me on this traineeship and erm obviously as part of the [X Project] she'd come and look for things like education and or work. So I would come here and she would try and find me things. So it was very helpful."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

*"...the learning mentor you see, that also added to the support that he got, in fact this learning mentor offered to take him to the appointment, but you do the assessment, he did the assessment by himself, but just getting him there, that hand holding bit."*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

*"I think that it's really important that the young person knows who is in school to turn to for a support network should they need to talk to somebody"*

*Participant 8 [Professional]*

In addition, having a positive relationship with a significant member of staff also facilitated the school in terms of the ways in which they could support that young person. For instance, in the example below, we see how the relationship contributes to the school being able to work in a more preventative way and allows the school to be pro-active about their approach towards the young person for that day:

*"...because the adult support that that young person had knew that kid inside out and had a very, very good relationship with them and could tell straight away what the mood of the day would be."*

*Participant 8 [Professional]*

Negotiating with the young person opposed to 'forcing' support on the young person was also linked to its efficacy. This could be achieved through discussion about what is available to them, what the support might 'look like' in practice and ultimately 'listening to the young person' and was found to be of importance in terms of the young person's engagement with the support on offer:

*"...if something's pushed upon me [referring to support] I very much back off. I have to do something off my own back I have to want to do it myself"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

*"I would say when people forced support on me it wasn't very helpful because I would spend a lot of time just tryna like get the support they'd given me away rather than actually like focussing."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

*"First I establish where they are, then listen to the issues that they are presenting, yes and try to understand what their concerns are, which is making them feel that way; what the insecurities are and then if there are certain things that we can agree in addressing those issues, we'll discuss them and we'll take responsibility I'll say okay I'll do this, you also do that and let's see what the outcome will be."*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

In order to support the young person's education it was identified that it is equally important to meet the needs of the professionals. In the study either professionals identified their own need for support or the need for additional support was identified more generally. Support for professionals could take the form of training, emotional support and access to advice:

*"I must acknowledge most of the things we do with young people we learn by experience. In our training we do not have sufficient material in every area we do not have sufficient material about education. "*

*Participant 5 [Professional]*

*"if you think they may be supporting some our most challenging young people, and even if they're not challenging they may still need support you know with things like the education element because they may have gone to school years and years ago and they need to be up-to-speed with what is going on at the moment."*

*Participant 6 [Professional]*

**"...they too [Foster Carers] need to be given training on how to deal with a child who is traumatised and who may communicate their pain through poor behaviour or what we would consider poor behaviour."**

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

**"...they have launched erm a designated teacher forum **which I have applied for because I think it would be really helpful for me.** You know **I have come in as a designated teacher erm I have had an awful lot of training in the six months"****

*Participant 8 [Professional]*

#### 4.3.7.2 WORKING WITHIN A MULTI - AGENCY TEAM

This aspect of support concerns the ways in which professionals come together to support the young person. A noted strength of multi-agency support was viewed to be the different professional expertise available meaning that professionals could support each other in coming together to provide a package of support for the young person. In addition, the varying professional views meant that the young person's strengths and weakness could be better identified. All of which came together to help improve the support available for the young person:

**"They are entitled to their thoughts to their assessment, **and that actually makes our cooperation a bit vibrant, you know, yeah, there are different opinions, different suggestions, I identify strengths, the other person identifies you know area to improve, and we come to a conclusion. But we work together and the bottom line is that we managed to help the young person move forward."****

*Participant 5 [Professional]*

The young person's Personal Educational Plan (PEP) was viewed as being an important joint working tool which could support the learning and educational progress of LAC:

**"We also support the children with their learning if there are any issues with **regards to their learning** then we do identify that within many different ways, **mainly through PEP meetings**, we do that every term. That's just come into force from April 1<sup>st</sup> last year."**

*Participant 4 [Professional]*



*"Erm I find the PEP and **the PEP process quite useful and now that it is being done termly that is useful because it's in situ with the cycle of the terms...I guess it is good at pulling everyone together to look at actually what are the targets, what progress has this young person been making, what can we do to support that**"*

*Participant 6 [Professional]*

Communication was noted as an important facilitator of multi-agency support. At times there could be variation between professionals but it was suggested that when there is consistent communication between professionals multi-agency support works well. In addition, it was noted that having positive relationships between professionals helped to facilitate joint working:

*"**It's the communication you see, we share information, we talk a lot, we explore options, yeah so that communication is very important yes**"*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

*"**Depends on the professional. Generally the working relationship between us and social care is very good. But sometimes you know you have, within every profession I guess you will have some social worker that will communicate with you all the time. I mean they will tell you placement changes or moves before they happen, whenever they have a little inkling about something they will come back to and let you know and I think it's situations where we've got that relationship with the social worker or with that school that actually things work really well.**"*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

It was recognised that schools and professionals working within a multi-agency context need to provide and share high quality information. It was noted that the flow of information was directed towards the school since the focus was on the young person's education. High quality information appeared to include information about any significant changes, the young person's placement status i.e. the degree of stability or if they were happy at their placement, information about the social worker i.e. if there had been a change of social worker:

*"I guess we work very closely with schools and ensure that schools have all the information **they need with regards to supporting that young person with their education and erm that includes if there is a change of placement or if there is a change of social worker**"*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

The quality of information could be influenced by the timing of the information and can sometimes help to prevent things from getting worse for the young person:

*"I guess because **if we know something is bubbling we can do more preventative work** you know **that support in place where it's needed** before that little volcano erupts but when it's already happened and we're tryna stick a plaster on a wound **you know it doesn't always happen and you know things get worse for that young person.**"*

*Participant 6 [Professional]*

*"Sometimes you don't even know that a child has moved **placement until [after] that child has moved placement.**"*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

#### 4.3.7.3 AWARENESS OF EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY

At times an individual's ability to provide support to the young person could be impacted by 'their own emotional availability'. For example, adults may find it difficult to support LAC if they are experiencing or processing their own emotional difficulties. This also applied to professionals and the LACYP peer group. In the example below we see that Participant 1 reflects upon some of the limitations of the support that her mother was able to provide due to requiring support herself:

*"If I'dn't [didn't] gone into foster care I'd just be sitting here in a few years and doing the same things I'm doing now. But **because my mum needs support, she can't physically support or emotionally support me when she herself requires support....**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

This may be both perceived and grounded in 'reality'. What is important here is that the limited emotional availability of the 'provider of support' had potential implications for how this support was experienced by the person receiving the support.

In the context of peer relationships, this meant that developing relationships and seeking peer support from other young people who were not in an 'emotionally stable' place could lead to negative outcomes such as getting involved with the wrong group of friends and engaging in risky behaviour, outside of school:

*"...But outside of school when you enter the wrong group of friends...For example I kind of went to my friend for just kind of, erm, advice and stuff but she'd also had a traumatic life... so that affected her very much. But she put a good mask on it. But she herself involved herself with the wrong group of people...And those young people there don't have the support they need...so they then go to drugs, they go to drink, they go to smoking. And I was led into that world..."*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

Professionals in the study remarked upon the emotional impact of working with vulnerable children and young people, and the need to protect themselves emotionally or having to find ways to 'cope with it' in order to continue supporting the young person:

*"I always kept a sort of positive view of things, whatever negative thing he threw, I tried to turn it into something positive, **maintaining that positivity actually helped protect me also, against the frustrations of his rejecting attitude and that's what allowed me to consistently go back...**"*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

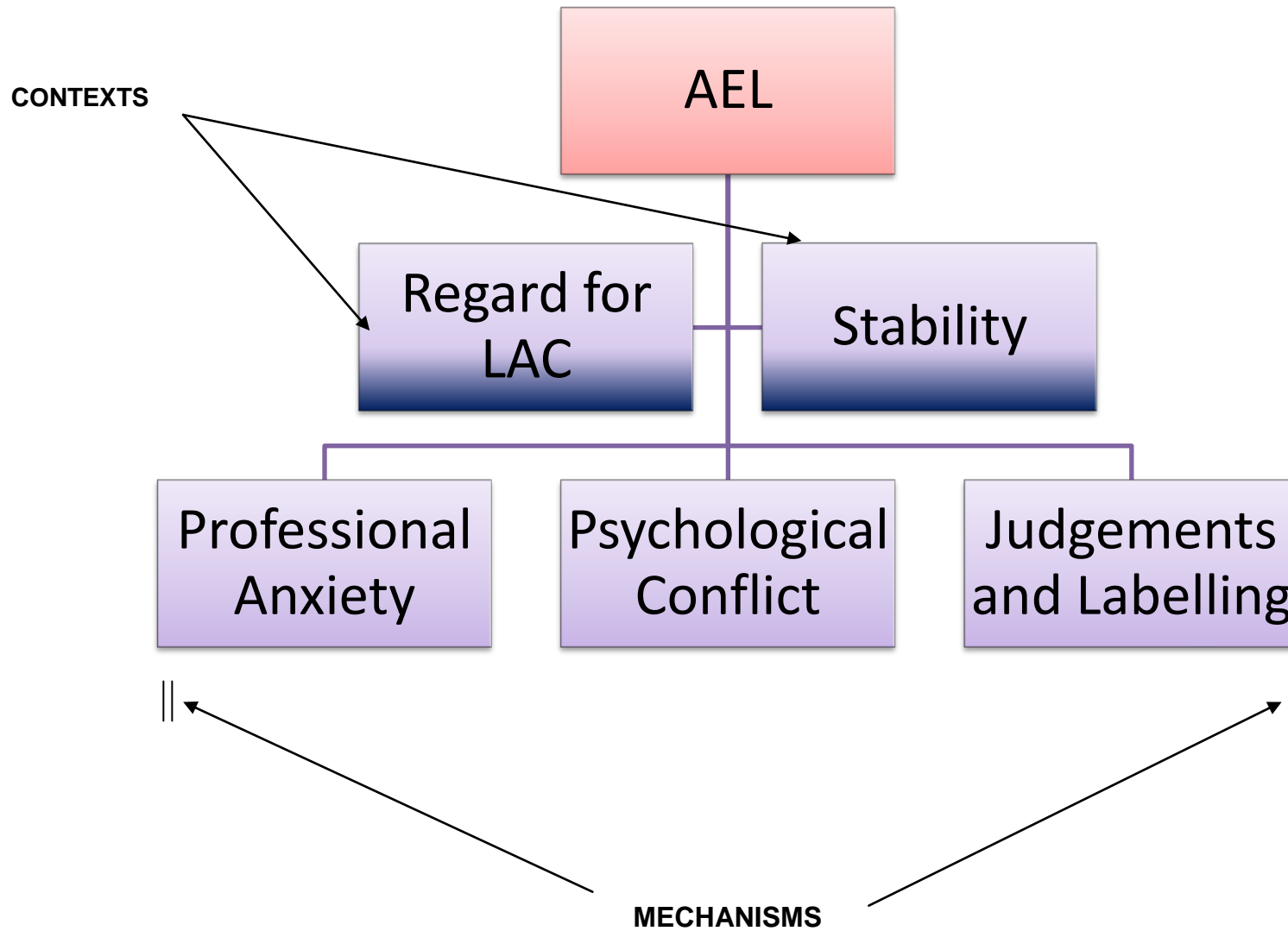
*"...but **sometimes given their mental health and circumstances I find it also challenging. They [LAC] complain against me as well you know...**"*

*Participant 5 [Professional]*

#### 4.4 WHAT IMPEDES PROGRESS

The remainder of this chapter will consider the contexts and mechanisms emerging within the data which can be considered to present a barrier to the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4.

Figure 11: Inhibitive Contexts and Mechanisms of AEL



#### 4.4.1 CONTEXTUAL BARRIERS

##### 4.4.1.2 REGARD FOR LAC

*"So if they only have a few vulnerable children as a whole then they are able to not put that sort of provisioning in their timetable and their use of staff and that, so yeah out-of-sight-out-of-mind."*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

'Regard for LAC' refers to an 'out of sight out of mind' phenomenon. In other words professionals are less likely to be mindful of the needs of LAC in the classroom or in within their professional practice unless they have previously experience with LAC, have a professional interest in LAC or have a LAC in their classroom:

*"Now I'm an English teacher, I **taught English for over 30 years** and I told you at the beginning of the interview that **I'd never thought about looked after children before**. I have taught KS4, you're talking about KS4, **I have taught the KS4 English curriculum, poems about mother and child relationships, I am very lucky I didn't have a looked after child in my class because these are about the love between mother and child, how would they feel about this?** You know, **a big part of how I used to work was to do autobiographies**, you know, **never even gave a thought to the fact 'I don't have a family' or 'I was removed from my family'** etc etc. **Genetics in Science**, you know how does that make a child feel? They may have never seen their parent or whatever, **so this whole curriculum needs to be taken on board.**"*

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

Within this context, not holding the needs of LAC in mind, the noted consequence is that curriculum and teaching and learning practices can at times be insensitive towards the emotional experiences of LAC. In terms of the consequences to a LAC's AEL, their participation in autobiography activity may be impacted due to emotional demands placed on them. Since all experiences are not the same, individual differences will suggests that this may vary between children in terms of the degree of intensity.

A further subsequent outcome of 'Regard for LAC' is inconsistency between schools in terms of their understanding of the needs of LAC and at times an inability to be flexible in terms of resources to support a wide range of needs. 'Regard for LAC' also had implications for the schools perceived capacity of their ability to meet the needs of a LAC. All of which appeared to be influenced by what the researcher labelled 'not enough LAC to matter' (open code). This relates to my earlier point that there are instances where a school may not have a LAC or may have very few or where, in instances where the school does have a LAC, the young person progresses with minimal if any need for additional intervention beyond the schools usual provisions.

*"...this is part of the issue I think, with the schools that we work with that's great but **there are some schools that don't have looked after children** so we are quite new to those schools...I think if they have had a range of looked after children, so more than one, I think their provisions, their experiences, are different and so they get a sense of what the varying needs can be and put in the support in place"*

*Participant 6 [Professional]*

#### 4.4.1.2 STABILITY

*"I missed my chance to go to college because erm when...before I moved into my auntie's like when I was just living at my mum's, and I'd never moved anywhere. I was looking for a job in the meantime but I wanted to go to college to do art. **But obviously I was moved about so many places and I had so much going on that I didn't really have time to apply for college and by the time I had settled it was too late...like all the spaces had had already been taken.**"*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

Lack of physical stability i.e. multiple placements, school placements and/or change of professionals impacted upon the young person in a number of ways. It impacted on the opportunities available to them. This can be seen in the example above where the young person feels as though her chance to go to college has been missed as a result of multiple placements post entry into care. A further observed consequence was a

negative impact on emotional availability i.e. decreased motivation, complex emotional feelings, not being able to invest in others and/or commit to things:

***"And after that you can imagine how he was feeling and the chaos and you now he rather liked these foster carers and then he is immediately moved to one and then another [referring to Foster Care placements]. So within the space of two weeks he's gone from one foster care placement to another to another."***

*Participant 7 [Professional]*

***"Coz like when I first came into care and they were doing an education plan I was like I just don't feel...like obviously I had been through a lot...and I was like I just don't feel like I can commit to anything."***

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

Lack of stability also related to the 'felt security' of the young person. This is the emotional security the LAC feels in terms of how secure their school or foster care placement. At times this could be unpredictable and if a significant enough incident occurred this could lead to a great deal of instability for the young person. It emerged within the data that sometimes things could be going well for the young person educationally but if an incident occurs within the placement this could potentially result in the young person having to leave. This had implications for the young person both physically and emotionally and subsequently impacted upon their educational progress:

***"And what happened was because of this incident the carer gave notice on this young person and erm this person was actually doing really well in school... the YP has since been moved to a care home. Since being in the care home it has really impacted on how the YP is getting on at school...whereas before the YP was flying, the YP progress has now stagnated. The YP has lost motivation and a willingness to learn or to engage and the YPs behaviour is now becoming a concern...it is a very unstable time for them which is impacting on them massively."***

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

#### 4.4.2 PROFESSIONAL ANXIETY

'Professional Anxiety' reflects points within the data when the group or organisation experience a conflict between two desired internal outcomes. This appeared throughout the data. Professionals supporting LAC sometimes experienced anxiety in relation to tough decisions concerning 'what the best outcome for the young person is' and 'what the young person wants'. This anxiety appears to impact the extent to which the young person's views are 'actioned':

*"So whilst we would have liked the YP to have had a few options to pick out of maybe three schools erm if they were given the option they might not have picked that would have been the best school for them [the young person]...I think at first the YP did have a different school in mind, it was one of the bigger schools that didn't fare to well with of our other children previously, so I think we kind of tried to persuade them. Because I guess if they didn't want to go to that provision then we wouldn't force them it is their choice...what we don't want to do is set them up to fail. I mean everything could have been fine but we want the best kind of opportunities for our YP and that sometimes means listening to them but sometimes trying to do what is right by them."*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

For the young people in the study it appeared that having the confidence and professional freedoms to work with and facilitate the desires in terms of their decision making and aspirations, for example, linked more closely to them feeling listened to and supported:

*"...the correct support would actually be listening to the person, what they wanted, even if it's irrational at the time..."*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

It also emerged within the study that sometimes the amount of professionals involved with the young person could negatively impact the outcome of the support on offer to the young person:

*"...intervention from **Clinical Psychologist, Educational Psychologist, the high needs intervention team, key workers for families**, all that support was there for this young person to access but I think to be fair there were just too*



***many professional involved and I think the young person just could not physically cope with the number of professionals that they had to gain trust with and also what they were dealing with in terms of their family... there was just too many people for that young person to cope with where as if actually there had been more intense support with one or two teams personally I think it may have been better.***

*Participant 8 [Professional]*

Whilst it was recognised that less professionals may have been better for the young person, professional 'red tape' 'professional confidence' and 'anxiety' impacted on the decision a possible decision that 'non-involvement' might be more helpful than 'involvement':

***"... the team is compelled to do that and they have to do that because they have to show the impact of their intervention but actually for this particularly young person it would have been better just having one or two agencies involved and I think that would have had a better impact..."***

*Participant 8 [Professional]*

#### 4.4.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT

Psychological Conflict reflects points within the data when the individual, experiences a conflict between two internal desires or motivations. At times the psychological conflict experienced by young people in the study impacted on the degree of trust they placed in schools and the extent they could express any potential difficulties:

***"You have your family and that's it. You do have the school but if you tell the school so much they then get social services involved and so it's very difficult."***

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

Participant 1 appears to experience feelings of being torn between her need to seek help and her reluctance to 'get social services involved'. Here school is viewed as both an entity which can support you but also 'if you reveal too much' as an entity which will bring you difficulty. This therefore has implications for Participant's 1 relationship with the school in that Participant 1 is potentially more likely to limit or withhold information that may be crucial in relation to the schools ability to provide effective intervention and support for her.

Other examples of psychological conflict relate to the ways in which young people in care attempt to resolve internal feelings of abandonment, being let down and unsupported by key adults. There were instances in the data which indicated that resolving psychological conflict could act as a protective factor:

*"And that goes back to my earlier comment, **'forgiveness is peace'** and you know you **might not even like to forgive them but it's not for them.**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

Also emerging during the analysis was the concept of 'independence as a defence mechanism' which was underpinned by the young person's conscious and unconscious needs to feel safe. In terms of independence this led to a held internal personal construct of independence of 'not needing to rely on anyone but yourself':

*"I don't like **depending on people and that's kind of a result of my own home life, my mum and people around me, I think it's very much safer in many ways to depend on only yourself...**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

Psychological conflict also had implications for the young person in terms of their willingness to accept support from professionals. For the researcher this appeared to be an integral aspect of a LAC experience since the fundamental premise of professional involvement or intervention is about supporting the young person. At times this could be challenging, the young person willingly accepting the support from a professional, and the absence of support can lead to adverse educational outcomes.

A dimension of accepting help was 'trust'. That is to be accepting of help/support requires the young person to have a degree of trust in the adult or professional. This trust relates to

the young person believing that the adult has their best interests in mind. This presents a particular barrier for the young person and also the professional trying to provide the support because sometimes LAC can have difficulties with trust. For example:

*"I didn't receive the right support and the support I was receiving wasn't correct for me and I refused to receive any others **because of trust issues.**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

There were also instances within the analysis that indicated other dimensions of accepting help which could at times 'override' the young person's decision to accept or reject help. This included the young person having a particular end-point or goal which linked with their personal aspirations, presented earlier, and framing in their mind that the help or support could be necessary in helping them to achieve their goal:

*Even though I like my independence...again it's very difficult with social services...to be a looked after child, it's very difficult especially when you want independence like I do. Erm because you still **have to play the game. You still have to accept you have to learn how to accept help and know when you need it.***

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

*"I want to make a difference, but to get there, there are many, many hurdles. And **to jump those hurdles I need those professional relationships**"*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

In these examples we can see that it is not necessarily the young person's 'trust' that has changed (since there is no evidence indicating this). Instead it is the introduction of an additional factor of having an understanding of 'how the support can benefit the young person' in a way that is in line with their personal ambitions. It is the necessity of needing "those professional relationships" which is the underlying causal mechanism here and can lead to a degree of psychological or emotional conflict within the young person i.e. conflicting psychological or emotional desires (presented in more detail later in this chapter).

Participant 1 states explicitly that "you have to learn to play the game" suggesting to the researcher that the 'accepting of help' in these circumstances is not linked to an increased sense of trust in professionals. On the contrary, to 'play the game' requires one to be acutely aware of the limits to which you can trust the other players.

#### 4.4.4 JUDGEMENTS AND LABELLING

*"...A lot of judgement, I feel like once you're in care they do make a lot of judgement..."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

*"...this is in a school setting and **the school kept on sort of erm pointing the finger at the young person**, so at a certain point I had to step in and just throw in a question which changed the dynamic..."*

*Participant 3 [Professional]*

'Judgements and Labelling' emerged as a category within the data and refers to instances where the young person felt as though assumptions were being made. It also included instances where they felt that LAC are lumped together as if they are not individuals. A consequence of this was the young person feeling misunderstood by professionals and impacted on the relationships developed. It also meant that sometimes young people were viewed as being incapable and lacking in resilience which meant that they were sometimes not given opportunities. A further consequence was that young people were not always taken as seriously as they might have liked.

The young people in this study expressed a desire to be viewed and treated as an individual and not 'casework' or 'LAC'. This is powerfully communicated in the following examples:

***"I don't like be called a Looked After Child, I'm not going to like be labelled as a care leaver. For example I mean my whole life from now, even after I turn 18, even when I'm 30 I will still be a care leaver"***

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

***"...not all of us are incapable...and this, with everything in Social Services, they can't do individuality. They can't look at someone, anyone as an individual and that is where they fall."***

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

There were also times when participants felt that they had to be careful about the views they expressed in an effort to avoid being misunderstood by professionals:

***"...especially in my PEP meetings and things to do with professionals that are looking on my progress, you can't present you're vulnerabilities, especially emotionally, otherwise I find in my experience you get the wrong help."***

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

***"Because obviously they're professionals right you don't wanna express yourself too much because then they'll like accuse you of like 'oh you don't want to get into education, you're not motivated' like you feel like they're gonna accuse you of that stuff."***

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

At times 'well meaning intentions' behind the support on offer did not carry through to the implementation stage. In other words, something which was in place to support the young person actually achieved the opposite:

***"And they were basically like 'oh you don't wanna do anything you just wanna go out with your friends blah blah blah' but like I just didn't feel mentally stable enough to actually commit to like college or work or something and like I just don't feel like they really understand that."***

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

Within the context of the care placement, this related to the complex nature of social care and the difficulties in being able to successfully protect the young person and the foster carer:

***"Yeah they're very confused as to how to protect both foster carers and foster child..."***

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

This seems to result in conflicting messages and present a barrier to the degree in which the foster carer is able to develop a caring and personalised relationship with the young person:

*"So one of the rules well social services say 'you have to make the young person feel like a normal young person in a normal home with a normal home life as much as possible' yet in the same breath they say that 'you cannot hug her you cannot tickle her, she cannot enter your room at any point' you know and things like this "*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

## 4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the overall theoretical understanding of the data and the subsequent facilitative and inhibitive mechanisms of educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4 which derived from the Grounded Theory analysis undertaken in this study. AEL provides one way of thinking about and constructing the dynamic relationship between LAC's psychological and emotional availability and the contextual factors which interact to facilitate or impede their educational progress.

In the final section, the researcher will reflect on the theoretical understanding of the data in relation to the overarching research questions posed by this study. The Discussion chapter will also consider the potential implications of the results as well as the limitations of the current study.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### 5.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The final chapter discusses the findings derived from the Grounded Theory analysis in relation to the overarching research question posed by this study. It explores and critically appraises the findings in relation to existing theory and literature before reflecting upon the methodological limitations of this study. Finally the chapter culminates in a consideration of the potential implications of the research with regard to professionals working to support LAC and the Educational Psychology profession as a whole.

### 5.2 STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

The researcher posed a single overarching research question of the data, exploring the facilitative contexts and mechanisms of educational progress for LAC at Key Stage 4. In seeking to understand what facilitates educational progress the researcher subsequently needed to further understand some of the inhibitive contexts and mechanisms which acted to potentially impede the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4. Therefore, 'what potentially impedes educational progress?' acted as a sub-question for the current study.

Emerging from the analysis was a substantive theoretical scheme which conceptually represented facilitative and inhibitive processes, operating within a given context, which the researcher labelled '*Availability to Engage in Learning*' (AEL). As outlined in the previous chapter AEL is a dynamic within child process which interacts with, and can be facilitated or inhibited by, the young person's environment.

*"It's about making sure that emotionally they're stable [the young person] because if they are not emotionally stable then they're not able to actually access their learning 9-times-out-of-10."*

*Participant 4 [Professional]*

*"You know when I feel like I'm just frustrated you know I'm not, I'm not, getting out of the lesson what I need to get out of it because I'm over thinking things, because I got other things on my mind..."*

*Participant 1 [Young Person]*

The above descriptions from participants in the study serve to illustrate the underlying principles of the AEL theoretical model. In order to participate in learning, children and young people need to be psychologically and emotionally available to engage with the 'learning process'. The AEL model proposes four facilitatory mechanisms operating within two key facilitative contextual processes and three barriers operating within two inhibitive contexts. The researcher asserts that understanding, promoting and embedding facilitative processes and mechanisms, and through limiting the identified barriers, LAC's psychological and emotional AEL will be enhanced, subsequently leading to more positive educational outcomes.

In the next section the researcher will discuss the facilitative mechanisms first before turning his attention to the inhibitive mechanisms.

### 5.3 CONTEXTUAL PROCESSES

As previously highlighted in Chapter 3, the researcher ascribes to the view that through the analysis of responses provided by participants we can elicit conceptual information about how they view the world and the conditions or contextual factors which led them to a particular response (Miller & Glassner, 1997; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Further, as indicated in the methodology chapter, social research generally operates within an open-system indicating that mechanistic processes are always contextually determined. Therefore the



researcher sought to understand observed outcomes through deepening his understanding of the interplay between the mechanisms and conditions within which they operate.

With regards to facilitative contexts the researcher noted that participants attributed causality to psychological and social processes. The researcher labelled these contextual processes: '*Prioritising Education*' and '*Thinking beyond Key Stage 4*'.

### 5.3.1 PRIORITISING EDUCATION

The emergence of the need to 'prioritise' the education of LAC and to guard against 'low expectations' as linking with educational outcomes of LAC is consistent with the reviewed literature (Martin & Jackson, 2002) and the wider literature on LAC (Firth & Horrocks 1996; Borland, 2000). Several participants within the current study highlighted the need for an educationally stimulating environment which had high educational expectations for all LAC. Having 'high educational expectations' concerns all professionals working to support the LAC and the individual themselves; of particular interest to the researcher was the key role the foster carer played in this. A number of the participants in the study made reference to the importance of the foster carer and social worker. Instances where the foster carer or social worker held high educational expectations and displayed a keen interest and desire for LAC to do well educationally were viewed as contributing to positive educational progress of the young person. Thus there was a clear sense within the data that the education of LAC is everyone's responsibility and that LAC's foster carer's and their social worker are uniquely positioned within the professional network to cultivate educational aspirations and a rich educational environment beyond the school context. This is consistent with the Martin and Jackson (2002) study which highlighted that the participants in the study frequently cited the importance of and need for positive encouragement and an active interest in the young person's education from significant individuals in their lives including their foster carers and teachers.

There were subtle variations in the ways in which 'low educational expectations' manifested. At times it was noted that inaccurate assumptions could be developed due to a lack of knowledge, understanding and/or experience with LAC. As such it appeared that 'being in care' could be inaccurately conflated with 'not able to achieve' which subsequently led to lower educational expectations of LAC among staff. This was both in terms of teaching and learning practices within mainstream classrooms and within alternative educational provisions. As one participant explained:

***"...basically not to feel sorry for them I mean you know give the child the same opportunity as any other child so stretch them, you know not to think "oh they're in care" give them the same opportunities to be able to get on and achieve."***

*Participant 6 [Professional]*

This finding is consistent with existing literature which highlights that the looked-after population is a dynamic group and that being 'looked after' alone cannot always be blamed for poor educational outcomes (Goddard, 2000), and warns against drawing conclusions that being looked after inevitably precludes poor educational outcomes (Harker et al., 2003; Jackson, 1989).

In addition, low educational expectations could be linked to the individual young person themselves due to their 'personal attributes' such as low confidence or self-esteem. Further, low expectations could be linked to the previous educational experiences of foster carers. For example, one participant (Participant 6) explicitly reflected that sometimes foster carers may require further training to bring them up-to-speed in terms of their knowledge and understanding of education and how best to support the young person. This also indicates to the researcher that what may initially be perceived as 'low expectations' or 'lack of involvement' in education from foster carers may be linked to their need for further training and clarification of the different ways in which their involvement can effectively support the young person's education. This is consistent with Martin and Jackson (2002) who found that

participant's in their study attributed the lack of encouragement received by LAC from their foster carers and residential care staff to being educated to a poor standard themselves and did not understand the importance of education or the steps required to achieve good qualifications.

An additional finding in the current study was the challenge faced by social worker's in relation to balancing safeguarding, the psychological and emotional needs of the young person, and the young person's educational needs. In the study, it was recognised that social workers are 'not educational professionals' and sometimes need to defer to the expertise of other members of the professional support network. Conceptually related to this, Participant 7 explained that with regards to virtual school teams *"if you don't have someone in that role who knows about education they can't challenge"*. It reasonably follows then that social worker's and also foster carers may also experience difficulties in being able to effectively challenge teachers and schools on issues relating to the child's educational progress when they are uncertain about the intricate workings of the school system. Reflecting on this, the researcher acknowledged the pertinence of the assertions by the DECP (2006) with regards to the potential role in which EPs can play in terms of supporting the education of LAC (see Chapter 1, section 1.6). In line with this, the researcher believes that there is a significant contribution to be made by EPs in terms of helping to bridge the gap between the home and school contexts. Further EP's may be well placed to facilitate decisions in terms of ways forward i.e. in the form of helping professionals to think about the best way to meet the psychological and emotional needs and extending them academically within a given educational environment.

### 5.3.2 THINKING BEYOND KEY STAGE 4

In consideration of the timing and impact of potential changes to the young person's care or educational placement 'Thinking beyond Key Stage 4' reflects the need to have a long term educational plan which can be flexible, renegotiated and adapted to accommodate for potential changes in the young person's life. 'Thinking beyond Key Stage 4' operates at 'systems' level in that it requires careful co-ordination between relevant professionals and so has been identified as a contextual mechanism.

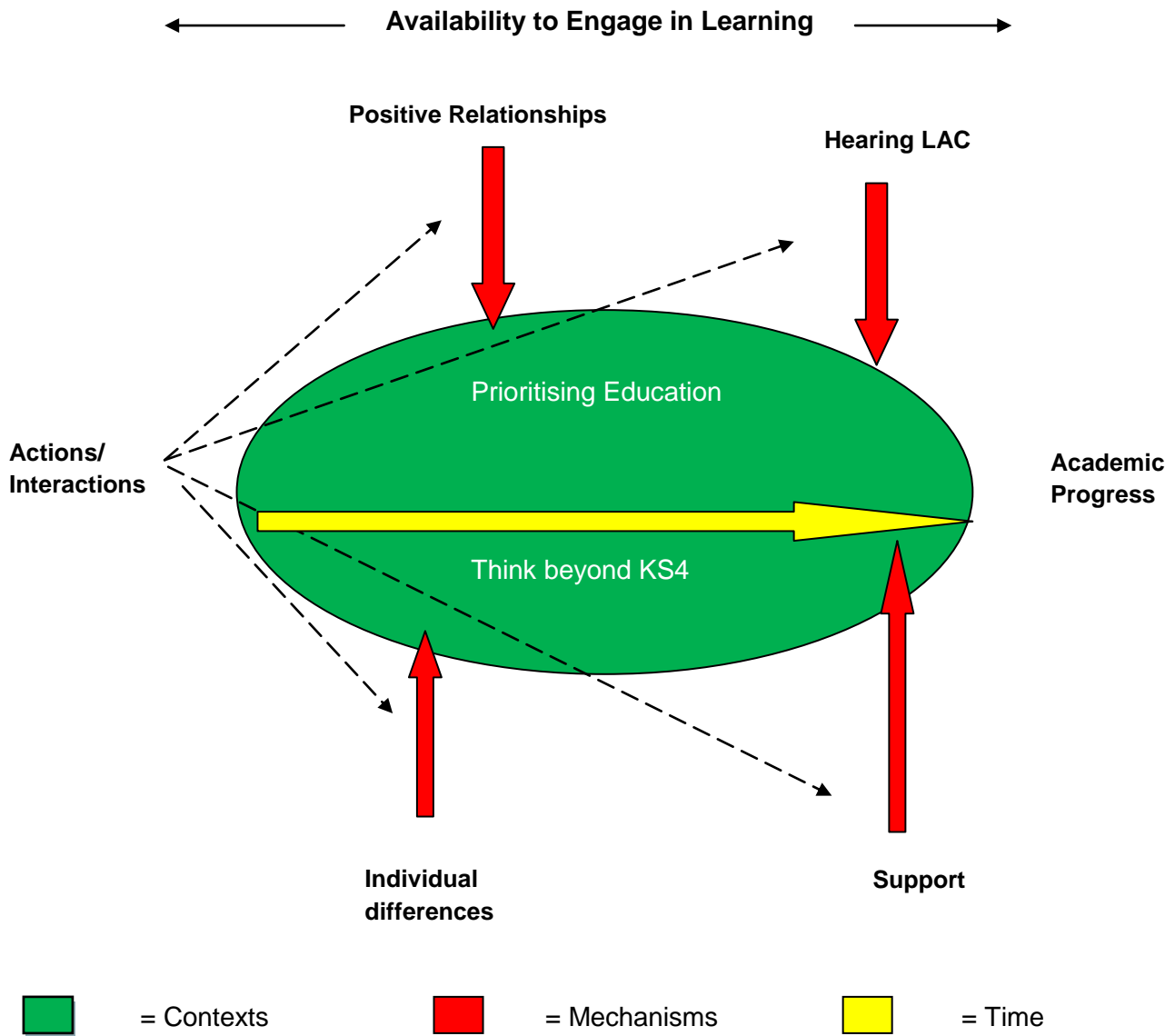
Through having a long term educational plan in place there may be greater possibility to cope with, and manage, situations where the young person does not make the expected progress in time for their GCSE examinations. Driscoll (2011) suggests that less attention has been paid to the education of LAC after they take their GCSE's. In this small study, completed in single county council in England, it was found that participants did not achieve the qualifications in line with their expectations. It was suggested that post-Key Stage 4 represents a key time in which LAC, who display considerable resilience and motivation to make up the deficit, require continuous support in terms of career advice and educational choices. In line with this, some of the participants in the current study felt that if support was continued then the educational trajectory could be turned around.

In practical terms, it is highly feasible that this could be incorporated into the LAC PEP which is already a statutory requirement (DCSF, 2009). At present the PEP is a working document and which is regularly updated and so by definition not necessarily designed to incorporate the longer term educational overview (see DCSF, 2009) however it is feasible that 'longer term outcomes' could be incorporated.

#### 5.4 MECHANISMS: WHAT MECHANISMS FACILITATE THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF LAC AT KEY STAGE 4?

This study included the experiences and perspectives of LAC and professionals who worked with LAC in various capacities to support their education. Participants were asked to consider in detail what contributed to the educational progress of LAC. The young people involved in this study were post Key Stage 4 and so reflected on their personal experiences identifying specific examples of when things went well for them and were asked to think about what aided their progress. Professionals drew and reflected upon on their personal experiences of working in professional teams and direct and indirect work with LAC at Key Stage 4. Professional experiences provided perspectives from school, local authority and social care contexts. Participant recordings were transcribed and interrogated for conceptual similarities and differences in relation to the research questions using the Grounded Theory approach detailed in Chapter 3. Emerging from this analysis were four facilitative mechanisms operating within two key facilitatory contexts. These have been visually represented in realist 'Context, Mechanism, Outcome' diagram (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

**Figure 12: Context, Mechanism, Outcome Model outlining Facilitators for Availability to Engage with Learning**



In the adapted CMO model, presented above, actions and interactions are not perceived to be separate entities rather these are subsumed (represented by the dotted arrows) within the social processes (used here synonymously with mechanisms), namely *'Positive Relationships'*, *'Hearing LAC'*, *'Individual Differences'*, & *'Support'*. Figure 12 illustrates how the four interpersonal processes operate within the contexts of *'Prioritising Education'* and *'Thinking beyond Key Stage 4'* to facilitate positive educational outcomes for LAC at Key Stage 4.

#### 5.4.1 POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

In keeping with the literature reviewed in chapter 2, an emergent facilitative factor of young people's education centred upon the development of positive and supportive relationships (Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010). In the current study, the importance of relationships was noted by both young people and professionals and concerned developing relationships with peers, significant adults or the young person's carer.

The significance of developing positive relationships can also be understood in terms of attachment theory. According to Schofield & Beek (2008, p.257) "sensitive, available, reliable caregivers, who provide practical and emotional help and support, reduce anxiety and free the young person to become more competent and confident in tackling new challenges in learning, in work and in relationships". There was clear evidence in the current study that, to a certain degree, the role of the 'caregiver' can be extended to incorporate 'significant individuals' in the young person's support network. This is exemplified in the account of Participant 2 [Young Person] who identified the relationship with 'Staff Member A' as being the most helpful form of support in relation to their education (see chapter 4, section 4.3.4).

In two of the studies reviewed, the significance of developing peer relationships (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Harker et al. 2004b) was noted. In the current study, peer relationships were found to be both facilitative and inhibitive for the young person. The development of positive peer friendships can have a positive influence on a young person's sense of wellbeing (Clough, Bullock & Ward, 2006). This is consistent with the current study in that peer friendships were found to be a mechanism in which the young person's self-esteem could be supported. For example, in relation to Participant 2's experience where we see that exposure to positive peer groups could be linked to this young person feeling more positive about themselves (see Chapter 3, section 4.3.4.4). The data also highlighted that 'hanging out with the wrong people' i.e. where a peer may not be emotionally available, experiencing their own distress or engaged in negative activities - drinking, smoking and taking drugs (see chapter 4, section 4.3.7.3) - could have potentially negative outcomes such as the young person being encouraged to also engage in these behaviours to the detriment of their own social, emotional and educational wellbeing.

The researcher was struck by the notable absence of 'sibling relationships' being referred to in the study which has been shown to be important for LAC in the wider literature (McCormick, 2010). Whilst questions concerning the nature and potential importance of sibling relationships were not explicitly asked by the researcher in the interviews there was scope within the interview for this to emerge. The absence of 'sibling relationships' may have occurred for a number of reasons; firstly, a significant proportion (50%) of children in care who have siblings are not placed with them (McCormick, 2010) and this is likely to have implications for communication and therefore relationships with siblings may not be identified. Secondly, in the presence of existing sibling relationships it is possible that these relationships may serve a different function and may not be viewed as being explicitly linked to their education. Finally, the young people in this study may not have had siblings although



this does not account for the possibility that the importance of sibling relationships could have been raised by professionals.

#### 5.4.2 HEARING LAC

Inevitably children want their views to be considered and genuinely listened to (Aubrey & Dahl, 2006). In the current study, emergent within the data was the different ways in which the 'presence' or the 'absence' of the young person's views could be linked to their educational progress. *'Hearing the young person'* reflects aspects of what constitutes being 'genuinely listened to' and related to both their involvement in decisions and feeling listened to more generally which positively facilitated their educational progress. The implications of LAC involvement has also been highlighted in the wider literature, for example, Harker et al. (2004) point out that part of the reason why PEPs are devalued is because they lack young people's involvement in the process.

Within the current study it was noted that for this to be achieved there needs to be a commitment to elicit the views of the young person. This 'commitment' operates at both an organisational level and at the level of the individual professional. Following on from this, professionals need to have an understanding of the potential compatibility (or incompatibility) between the contextual conditions and the individual differences among LAC i.e. in terms of their self-esteem, confidence and overall ability to articulate themselves in front of professionals. For example, it was noted that having to express your view in front of a range of professionals can be 'more or less' challenging depending on the confidence of the young person (See Chapter 4, section 4.3.5.2) which indicated to the researcher the presence of an interaction between the environment and the personal attributes of LAC. Munro (2001) highlights that empowering LAC is a developmental task with children informed and guided in line with their developing competencies. Therefore, LAC can be reasonably expected to gradually take on more responsibility in matters concerning them. In line with this

developmental perspective, the current study highlighted that in situations where the young person lacked confidence or found it challenging for other reasons, having access to an advocate helped to support the young person to express their views in these situations.

In the present study, incorporating and being responsive to the views of the young person could be linked to facilitating their sense of 'personal agency' which in turn encourages LAC to take ownership of their educational trajectory and thus acting to facilitate their educational engagement.

This finding is consistent with attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985) which contends that personal motivation and increased expectancy of success can be linked to the extent to which the individual feels in control. Therefore, it can be reasonably hypothesised that through increasing the extent to which LAC are involved in decision making, with respect to their education and their lives more generally, LAC will feel more empowered and subsequently more motivated to strive for success. A lack of involvement in decision making has also been linked with feelings of helplessness (Leeson, 2007) which can in turn have negative consequences in terms of the young person's ability to cope with situations in which they are expected to be autonomous and independent individuals such as when they enter independent living (Rutter, 2000). It follows then, that this may also have implications for the young person's engagement with further and higher education in which they are expected to become more autonomous learners. Thus, including young people in decision making at the earliest opportunity may have implications for both the young person's immediate (Key Stage 4) and long term educational success (education beyond Key Stage 4).

Finally, the literature suggests that whilst young people may want to be involved in decision making opportunities such as review meetings to influence outcomes, a primary reason given for their motivation to participate in these meetings can be linked to their desire to

have their opinions heard (Thomas & O'Kane, 1999). In the current study, participant descriptions indicated that there were instances in which the young person's views were elicited yet the young person did not feel listened to. In addition, there were instances in which the young person could feel listened even if the overall outcome did not necessarily reflect their personal decision or choice. This suggested to the researcher that these were conceptually different and subsequently 'involvement in decisions' and 'being heard' were conceptually delineated. The current study highlighted that sharing the reasoning behind outcomes of decisions with LAC could help to facilitate the young person feeling listened to. In addition, it was also important to recognise that 'being listened to' extends beyond PEP meetings, review meetings and any other formal structures in place to elicit the views of the young person. This study highlighted that taking the young person seriously, through having an open dialogue and not belittling their views within the context of a relationship or at other times outside of formal structures in place, were just as important.

#### 5.4.3 INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

This mechanism relates to three within child factors: personal aspirations, motivation and coping and varies according to the individual child. It is important to note that the researcher adopts a developmental perspective with regards to the within child factors outlined above which suggests a gradual acquisition of skills and competence (Munro, 2001). Therefore, these are not viewed as being dichotomous traits but are instead on a continuum in which LAC may have 'higher or lesser' defined constructs of their personal aspirations, may be 'more or less' motivated to engage in their education and may be 'more or less' able to cope with their environment. This also needs to be understood within the context of the young person's environment. That is, the contextual conditions can facilitate or inhibit within child constructs.

One finding within the current study which was not identified within the reviewed literature was the significance of 'personal aspirations'. Martin and Jackson (2002) note that there was a link between the degree of interest and importance placed on education by parents and the individuals aspiration to succeed educationally in order to make their parents proud of them. This finding is supported in the wider literature which has demonstrated that children's educational aspirations are strongly correlated to those of their parents (Strand, 2007). However, this does address the significance 'personal aspirations' as a construct in itself. It is important to clarify that 'aspirations' are qualitatively distinguishable from 'expectations' (Lupton & Kintrea, 2008) in that aspirations concern what the individual might hope to achieve. In the current study, personal aspirations related to both the young person's educational future and the possibility of the young person being in a more positive emotional space in the future. Subsequently, this linked to the young person's engagement with education and their drive to succeed because they had a clearer understanding of what they wanted to achieve and the ways in which education could be part of that plan.

The adolescent stage, particularly during Key Stage 3, has been highlighted as a significant period for young people in terms of developing their personal aspiration and has been linked to positive future occupational outcomes (Gottfredson, 2002; Schoon & Parsons, 2002). With regard to supporting the educational progress of LAC at Key Stage 4 this reiterates the need for early intervention and having a long-term educational plan for the young person. Further, the significance is not only about having 'high aspirations' it is also about understanding what the young person's aspirations are and how this can then be facilitated by professionals.

The second within child factor concerned the young person's 'motivation' and related to both internal and external influences. The influence of motivation for learning was minimally cited in the reviewed literature and the current study helps to re-emphasise that it is important not to 'overlook' the significance of 'motivation' with regards to supporting the educational

progress of LAC. Internal motivation related to the young person's personal aspirations for learning i.e. what they wanted to get out of it. There were instances within the data that suggested that where learning could be practically linked to the young person's aspirations such as securing a job it could help to facilitate their engagement in the topic (See Chapter 4, section 4.3.6.3). External influences such as lack of stability i.e. school/placement moves or experiencing difficulties more generally could negatively influence the young person's motivation. In relation to the wider literature, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002) highlights that intrinsic motivation can be important for supporting psychological needs.

Coping was identified as the final within child factor in this study. This mechanism concerned the ways in which adults i.e. the foster carer, social worker and school staff attributed educational progress or lack thereof to a LACs ability to cope with the environmental demands of the context. Within the context of a critical realist approach the researcher understood the mechanism of 'coping' to be an interactive construct. In other words, he considered the extent to which the 'perceived ability of the young person to cope' was influenced by both the individual coping mechanisms of the young person and the extent to which the school, social worker or foster carer felt they could meet the needs of the young person. The researcher believes that it is at this middle point in which possible 'tensions' arise which can have significant implications for the young person, for example, in terms of whether they are thought to be able to continue within the school placement and/or care placement which can subsequently impact on the young person's education.

This mechanism is best understood within the context of dispositional attribution, a concept within attribution theory. Fundamental to this theory is that causal attributions toward situational and dispositional factors underpin trait inferences (Gilbert, 1998). In line with this, this theory contends that when individuals perceive that the observed behavior can be attributed to difficult situational circumstances then they are less likely to judge them harshly.

In the current study, this was illustrated through Participant 4s explanation that when schools felt supported and were aware of the young person's difficulties outside they were more likely to take a compassionate approach and try to support the young person as opposed to moving towards some form of exclusion (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.6.2). In contrast to this the researcher hypothesises that where the actions are attributed to the individual child i.e. their coping mechanisms then conversations about the young person's suitability for that school or placement are more likely to occur. This therefore indicates to the researcher that through having an understanding of this social psychological process EP's can be well placed to facilitate discussions and potential ways forward in terms of supporting the young person's coping mechanisms and supporting the school in feeling more empowered to meet the needs of the child.

#### 5.4.4 SUPPORT

Support within the context of this study applied to both the ways in which professionals supported the young person and also the extent to which professionals and foster carers require support themselves in order to be effective in their roles.

Professionals work in various ways to support young people and again the relationship formed with the young person (discussed earlier) played an important role in facilitating this support. Further identified in this study was the way in which professionals come together to support young people in care which is known as multi-agency working. With the exception of Jacklin et al. (2006) and (Davey & Pithouse, 2008) the significance of multi agency working in terms of supporting the educational progress of LAC was minimally cited in the literature reviewed.

Despite this, the importance of multi-agency working in supporting the education of LAC more generally i.e. not specific to Key Stage 4 has been emphasised in the wider literature. Coulling (2000) stresses that for statutory agencies to work together more effectively they have to have a shared understanding of what constitutes a successful education. Having a shared understanding facilitates the ability of professionals to put in place a coordinated plan of action to support that young person. In the current study, developing a shared understanding of the young person was linked to the differing expertise that the professional brought to the table through their different assessments and ways of thinking about the young person. This helped to provide a holistic picture of the child in terms of their strengths and weaknesses.

PEP's were also seen as a key facilitator to multi-agency working because it helped to bring professionals together which can be difficult due to time constraints. Participant 6 noted that in terms of best practice it would be ideal if professionals got together more regularly however in the context of time constraints due to professionals being extremely busy this was less likely to occur. This further indicated the importance of the PEP as it represented at least one structured opportunity a term in which professionals came together. The impact of time constraints has also been raised elsewhere in the literature (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge & Sinclair, 2003).

Harker et al (2003) concluded that in the same way a holistic approach is considered the best approach for working with LAC so too is a holistic approach to promote effective inter-professional practice. Key factors identified were effective communication and the sharing of reliable information. This was also indicated in the current study which highlighted the importance of regular and open channels of communication between professionals. It was found that communication could be influenced by the individual professional and the information received which could vary in terms of its quality. The 'quality' referred to both the

'timing' of information i.e. social workers informing virtual school officers and schools about placement moves before they occur, and to the 'importance' of the information i.e. if the young person is happy with their placement or experiencing any difficulties, any significant changes or if there were ways in which the school could support the young person more effectively (practical advice). The importance of high quality information is consistent with the literature (Harker et al., 2003; Jacklin et al., 2006) however the current study helps to extend our understanding of potential impact for LAC at Key Stage 4. For example, through having high quality information allowed professionals to work more preventatively in that they were able to work with schools earlier to put an effective plan of support in place. In addition, referring back to my earlier point about dispositional theory, if schools are able to inform schools earlier about instances of difficulty the school is more likely to be sympathetic to the young person's needs because they attribute the difficulties to situational factors. Therefore this has clear implications for the stability of LAC education at Key Stage 4 in which, as indicated in the literature discussed in Chapter 2, disruptions in Years 10 and 11 needs to be kept to a minimum if the young person is to be successful.

Finally, the importance of supporting the emotional needs of professional was an emerging factor in the current study which was not highlighted in the literature. This related to the entire professional network supporting LAC and particularly the foster carer and school who experienced the young person on a day-to-day basis. Where professionals and the foster carer felt supported they were in a better position to provide the consistency and containment needed to effectively support the LAC. According to Douglas (2007):

*“Containment is thought to occur when one person receives and understands the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed by it, processes it and then communicates understanding and recognition back to the other person. This process can restore the capacity to think in the other person” (p.33).*



In not being 'overwhelmed' by the difficulties and challenges experienced by the professional needs to be able to differentiate their own feelings from those absorbed from young person.

In doing so the professional is in a better position to:

- Understand the child's needs and how to meet them
- Contain parts of child's experiences, helping them to identify, verbalise, and make manageable those uncontrollable feelings

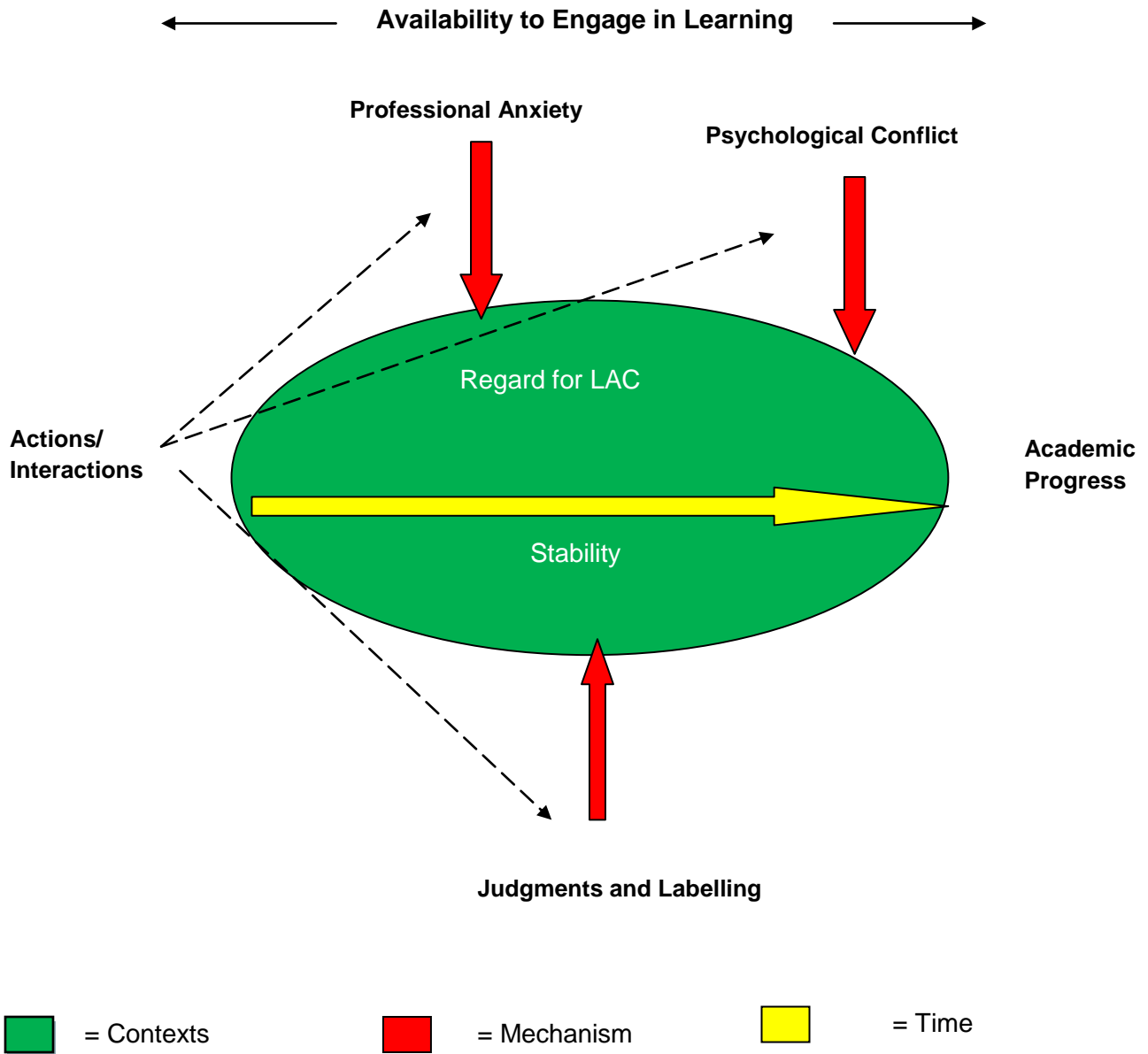
(Kahn, 2005)

Whilst social workers are likely to have access to personal supervision which may address these issues foster carers and schools may not. Thus this represents a clear role in which EP's working with LAC may be able to make a significant contribution.

#### 5.5 SUB-QUESTION: WHAT FACTORS IMPEDE THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF LAC AT KEY STAGE 4?

As previously highlighted, in order to understand more effectively what supports educational progress of LAC at Key stage 4 the researcher needed to develop his understanding of the contextual and individual inhibitive mechanism which operate to present barriers to educational progress. Again, these were placed in a CMO model (Figure 13) to visually represent the interactive influences on educational progress. The contextual influences were identified as 'Regard for LAC' and 'Stability'. These will be discussed first before moving on to discuss the individual inhibitive mechanisms: '*Professional Anxiety*', '*Psychological Conflict*' and '*Judgements and Labelling*'.

Figure 13: Context, Mechanism, Outcome Model outlining the Barriers Availability to Engage with Learning



### 5.5.1 REGARD FOR LAC

The profile of LAC, in terms of knowledge and understanding of their needs and the level experience among professionals is uneven. Linking to the earlier described contextual influence of 'Prioritising education' this can only be achieved once the needs of LAC are held at the forefront of practice among professionals and in particular the education system and schools. Earlier in Chapter 4, we saw Participant 7 reflect on the fact that whilst teaching English for over 30 years the needs of LAC had not been considered. The profile of LAC within education has steadily been raised however it appears to be the case that the since LAC may represent only a small population of the children and young people attending a school the consistency of practice remains variable and thus has implications for the nature and types of support received by LAC in relation to their education. This finding, whilst not addressed in the literature review, appears consistent with findings elsewhere which highlight that the needs of LAC are less likely to be prioritised as a distinct group in terms of support and provision (their needs tend to be addressed within normal schooling provisions) within education due to their low numbers (Fletcher-Campbell et al. 2003).

### 5.5.2 LACK OF STABILITY

The impact of 'stability' or lack thereof on the LAC education was noted in a number of studies reviewed in the literature (Davey & Pithouse, 2006; Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010; O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007). Instability i.e. in terms of care or educational placement impacts the emotional development of young people in care. Lack of continuity affects educational progress, impacting on children's capacity to develop relationships with teachers and/or professionals and on their willingness to trust in their guidance (Peake, 2011). Further, it is unlikely that temporary or short term placements are conducive to either the child or the carer to invest in the relationship (Peake, 2011). In the current study, the timing of the placement move or breakdown was significant with both

young people in care noting that the difficulties they experienced emerged during Year 10 and 11. This finding is consistent with O'Sullivan and Westerman (2007) who emphasised the link between difficulties emerging during Key stage 4 and reduced attainment and options. This was experienced by both young people and particularly Participant 2 who explained that she felt her chance to go to college had been missed as a result of constant placement changes (See Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.2). In the current study, both effective support for the foster carer and limiting the number of children with complex needs in the care placement were identified as being possible mediating factors of the care placement. Although this second aspect was explored to a lesser extent it is consistent with existing literature (Ingley & Earley, 2008).

With regard to the young person's educational placement a lack of permanence often resulted in two outcomes: a move to alternative provision or exclusion. Both of these outcomes appeared to have detrimental effects for the young person. A move to an alternative provision was felt by participants in this study to lack the educational rigour and challenge of mainstream schools. This meant that able LAC students placed in these provisions were less likely to achieve their expected grades. Further Participant 7 indicated that due to the small cohorts there were less opportunities for social learning and mixed ability teaching. The effects of mixed ability teaching within the classroom have been shown to have positive effects for children from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Kutnick, Sebba, Blatchford, Galton & Thorp, 2005). Whilst the concept of permanent exclusion was not explored in great depth in the current study the negative effects are well documented in wider literature (Social exclusion Unit, 2003).

In the current study it emerged that effective interagency collaboration can help to prevent breakdown in both the care and school placement and mediate and/or limit the impact on the young person through careful transitions. The influence of inter-agency or multi-agency

working on limiting the impact of placement moves and/or placement instability is supported in the existing literature (Harker et al., 2004).

Finally, it should be pointed out that 'felt stability' did not only relate to physical stability i.e. in terms of number of placement moves. The current study also highlighted the importance of boundaries, relationships and psychological and emotional support for the young person which all contributed the young person's feelings of 'stability'. There appears to be a 'very real reality' that at any point an incident can occur in which the consequence is the removal of the young person from the placement (See Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.2). The idea that there are no guarantees that the placement will work out can have significant implications for the young person's feelings of stability and felt security. This point, that 'stability' is a broader concept than physical placement moves, is reinforced by Freundlich, Avery, Munson and Gerstenzang (2006) who argue that permanency multi-faceted and incorporates relationships, stability feelings of safety and continuity. However, it should be noted that the researcher is able to also see the potential benefits of a placement move i.e. when there is agreement between the carer and the young person that this might be the best course of action because it is not working out.

### 5.5.3 PROFESSIONAL ANXIETY

'Professional Anxiety' related to instances within the data in which 'anxiety' about potential negative outcomes of decisions and 'backlash' on professional impact on their decision making and causing them to be 'risk averse'. This had direct implications for the young person in terms of their involvement in decision making, the importance of which has been discussed earlier, and implications for efficacy of support and of the independence and resilience skills engendered in the young person.

Munro (2001) suggests that acting in the best interest of LAC involves both having good intentions and a full understanding of 'what is actually in their best interest'. In addition "...the balance has to be continually re-negotiated between protecting the child and letting them learn to take risky decisions and to think for themselves" (Munro, 2001, pp. 16-17). However, in the context of professional anxiety whilst the professional network around the child may have had well meaning intentions for their anxiety prevented the capacity to which they could think openly. In relation to the impact of anxiety on decision making Menzies (1960) states that:

*'Making a decision implies making a choice between different possible courses of action and committing oneself to one of them, the choice being made in the absence of full factual information about the effects of the choice. All decisions are thus attended by uncertainty about their outcome and consequently by some conflict and anxiety. The anxiety consequent on decision-making is likely to be acute if a decision affects the treatment and welfare of patients.'* pp.446

Thus it is apparent that in the context of decisions in which the professional anxiety is not acknowledged, addressed and effectively supported then decisions may not always be in the best interest of the child. This will not be due to a lack of well meaning intentions instead it will be due to professionals making 'acute' decisions because they are unable to tolerate uncertainty and anxiety which inevitably surround decisions making with regards to complex cases.

Professional anxiety also applies to the group and organisational level such as working in multi-agency teams and can be understood within the context of psychodynamic group theory. Group dynamics concern the structure and formation of groups, group processes and the functions of a group. Psychodynamic theory helps us to understand the conscious and unconscious processes that affect individual and group functioning of which anxiety and uncertainty are central (McRae & Short, 2010). In the previous chapter the researcher highlighted instances where professionals involved in teams were unlikely to feel confident enough to withdraw their involvement even if they felt that this might be the best

course of action. This was because of pressures placed upon them to 'quantify' their involvement.

Thus the importance of professionals having their own psychological needs supported is required not only to 'process' the demanding and complex work of meeting children and young people's containment needs (described earlier), but also to enable professionals to respond to complexity, uncertainty and risk particularly in the current risk-averse, increasingly bureaucratic approaches to practice. Psychological facilitation of multi-agency groups with the remit of supporting the group to 'guard against anxiety' and return to their primary function of supporting the young person is a key area in which EP can play a significant role.

#### 5.5.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT

'Psychological Conflict' within the young person was not addressed by the literature reviewed. Challenging 'pre-care' and 'during care' experiences have a significant impact on the emotional development of the young person. Emotional difficulties can subsequently impact on the young person's engagement with learning, their engagement with professionals to support their learning and in their social and behavioural development. In the current study, it was noticed that emerging from this was 'psychological' conflict. This related to the competing internal desires of the young person. In the example in Chapter 4 we saw that at times young people in care may want to be able to trust professionals and rely on their support however they may also want to be independent. This cause an internal psychological conflict in which the young person believes that in order to trust someone else they are in some way 'giving up' their sense of independence. Psychological conflict also concerned the ways in which LAC processed difficult and complex emotions such as their entry into care, their relationships with their families and feelings of abandonment and being let down.

The researcher contends, based on participant descriptions, that LAC's need to feel independent emerges from their early psychological and emotional experiences. As such experiencing psychological conflict can be understood within the context of attachment theory. Bowlby (1969 & 1980) asserts that the quality of early attachment relationships becomes internalized and influences the ways in which the child understands themselves and the world around them. Internal working models, of which the researcher would argue 'psychological conflict' is one, are viewed as key indicators of how the child is likely to cope and manage future relationships and endeavors. Thus unresolved psychological conflict can present a significant barrier to the young person educational progress.

### 5.5.5 JUDGEMENTS AND LABELLING

For LAC to be able to talk openly about personal and sometimes emotionally distressing issues requires a high degree of trust in the professional and/or professional team. Changes in professionals or a relatively brief exposure to a new working relationship can mean the young person having to place their trust in someone new (Department for Education, 2011). In addition, the researcher picked up on a further psychological group dynamic which was that in revealing personal and painful experiences to another one must be certain that the receiver is capable to process this information in a way that allows the individual to feel supported. LAC also need to be able to express their views without fear of negative consequences as a result. This relates to the concept of the 'container' and 'being contained' (Douglas, 2007) discussed earlier.

In the current study, both young people expressed a conscious awareness of the limitations and at times negative consequences of sharing in detail the extent of their vulnerabilities (see Chapter 4, section 4.4.4). The consequences were that the young person feels judged, without a voice, disempowered and can at times receive incorrect support as result. In addition this could also be attributed to inaccurate assumptions and/or



unconscious/conscious biases among professionals as to the underlying causes of the young person's behavior:

*"Yeah their ignorance, yeah like you can try and say like how your feeling but like then if they've got their own opinion...if they've got their own opinion on something they're not gonna listen to you. It's like, let's say if they assume you're lazy, even if you could try and say something to them, but because in their mind they've already thought you're lazy they're already looking for it, ..."*

*Participant 2 [Young Person]*

This further relates to Wiener's (1985) attribution theory in which causality for challenges and difficulties observed are attributed to the young person. The researcher contends that these attributions are sometimes misplaced because at times the professional group may not be fully able to process the complexities of difficulties experienced by the child.

## 5.6 CRITIQUE OF THE METHODOLOGY

### 5.6.1 SELECTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This aspect of the study concerns two issues. With regards to the selection of young people involved in this study, the researcher is acutely aware that there were a number of LAC who would have been eligible to participate in this study however a decision by the school was taken that it was not appropriate for them to take part. This was often done during initial contact with the school via email or over the phone. This indicates to the researcher that the young person was not consulted, since the decision was taken immediately. This to an extent reflects the significant difficulty in trying to undertake research with highly vulnerable groups- they are deemed too vulnerable to participate. Whilst the researcher acknowledges that schools were 'acting in the best interest' of the young person, in not consulting the young person about their own beliefs with regard to their capacity to become involved in research they undermining the young person's sense of agency. The researcher is of the

belief that it would have been better to consult the young person and then tried to facilitate their decision as best as possible.

In other words, the researcher reflects that this represents part of the issue and to an extent undermines some of the principles set out in this study. It also relates to the 'Professional Anxiety' concept discussed earlier in this chapter i.e. that decisions taken were more acute due to the anxiety around the young person potentially participating in the research. The researcher also acknowledges that this also reveals something about the participants who were involved in this study- that they may not be representative of 'more severe' LACYP or may be in a more stable place to reflect on their experiences. However LAC are not a homogenous group and all experiences are considered equal and valid in terms contributing to our understanding of how to best support their education.

With regards to the professionals involved in this study a noted strength was the incorporation of a varied group of professionals- social worker, DT and VSOs. Whilst the researcher would have included foster carer in this study given the theoretical relevance emerging within the during data analysis, time constraints did not permit this. It is acknowledged that the absence of foster carers views in this study is likely to have impacted on this research and clearly represents an area in which this study could be extending further.

### 5.6.2 LIMITATION OF COLLECTING DATA THROUGH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

A potential unintended consequence of obtaining the views of through surveys and structured or semi-structured interviews is that these views are subsequently constrained, defined and measured within parameters imbued with the values of the individuals undertaking the research (Winter, 2000) which in turn reflects a passive model of participation (Sinclair, 2004). To an extent this was ameliorated in the current study through

implementing a Grounded Theory approach to the data analysis in two ways. Firstly, this study completed interviews with LAC first. These interviews informed the subsequent interview schedules for the professional participants involved in the study. Whilst the researcher acknowledges that the interviews with professionals were also semi-structured, and so allowing for new concepts to emerge, they were largely informed by what emerged in the interviews with LAC. Secondly, the data was interrogated conceptually to develop a coherent theory which in turn indicates that 'weight' was given to concepts and not to the views of individual participants. In other words the views of LAC in this study were not taken 'less seriously' by virtue of the participant being a LAC or vice versa.

### 5.6.3 LIMITATIONS OF GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS

As with any research methodology Grounded Theory is not without its limitations. At times studies draw on a range of methodological approaches or implement GT inappropriately or inadequately (Stern, 1994) and Bryant (2002) highlights that the flexibility of the approach can be put forward as a justification for potential flaws in methodological strength. The current study implemented GT as closely as possible to the criteria outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) in terms of theoretical sampling methods, and drawing upon the research paradigm which is in place to support the quality and robustness of the emergent theory.

A further criticism of Grounded Theory concerns the feasibility of engaging in a theory or knowledge neutral endeavour (Bryman, 2008). As the researcher indicated in Chapter 2, he acknowledges that he cannot simply disregard the fact that his prior knowledge will ultimately impinge on the data analysis process. However, in this regard the researcher also adopted an open and reflexive approach towards this, acknowledging that the current topic area has an extensive research base and so it would be impractical not to use this information to help inform his reflections. This approach is consistent within Corbin and Strauss's (2008) understanding of GT. In the current study potential biases in interpretations were guarded against through having an AP provide a 'critical voice'. As stated in Chapter 3,

the first two interviews were coded separately by the researcher and the AP. Differences in coding were then discussed and the researcher reflected upon these. For the remainder of the interviews the AP looked through the researcher's codes and provided her views. Ideally the format applied to the first two interviews would have been applied to all interviews however due to time constraints this format was not feasible.

It has been noted that researcher can experience difficulties in determining when the data they have can be regarded as 'sufficient data' (Crewell, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical saturation (explained in Chapter 3) relates to the depth and breadth of the properties and dimensions of the emerging categories and it may not always be possible to reach complete saturation and it is unlikely that eight interviews will achieve full saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). That being said, there is a clear difference between 'full' saturation and 'emerging concepts which have depth and breadth in terms of their properties and dimensions. The researcher is realistic about the degree of saturation of all of his concepts and this is why not all of the open codes and axial codes contributed to the overall theory since they lacked sufficient depth. Further, the researcher acknowledges that the substantial theory represented in this study requires further refinement and scrutiny with regards to its ability to account for emerging data in a range of contexts before one can hope to make strong claims with regards to the scope of its theoretical application. However, this does not detract from the theories potential and the robustness of the process. Indeed the further refinement and scrutiny described is part of the grounded theory process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## 5.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The overall, the aim of this research was to provide a theoretical framework, for the researcher's local authority to find out 'what works' in supporting the educational

achievement of LAC. Having conducted the research the following implications for practice are outlined below:

- The researcher intends to help raise the profile of LAC among educational professionals through the delivery whole school/service training about what supports their education. The researcher also intends to share the findings of this study with teams who already work with LAC on a day-to-day basis.
- The researcher intends to continue on his journey as an EP and further develop a specialism with regards to LAC which is in line with the researcher's recommendation that all EP teams should have a specialist remit within this area.
- As a consequence of working on this research project the researcher has formed good relationships with various teams who support LAC in the borough and hopes to further strengthen these relationships.
- The researcher will share his findings with his EP team at a whole service day to further embed the knowledge gained from this study into the EP profession.

### 5.7.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were several findings in this study which had clear implications for the field of Educational Psychology and future research. These are outlined below:

- There appears to be the potential for EP's to have an increased role working directly with LAC or with professionals who work to support LAC. This could take the form of having greater integration/stronger partnership working with specialist services such as the virtual school, social work teams and designated teachers. In addition, EP's could deliver specific training on supporting the educational progress of LAC to school staff.

- EP's are uniquely placed to provide psychological supervision to multi-agency teams who work to support the education of LAC. A key remit within this would be to facilitate the groups awareness of 'professional anxiety' and the potential unconscious influences this might have on their decision making i.e. whether their decisions are reflective of the aspirations and needs of the young person they are supporting. The efficacy of having an EP facilitate multi-agency teams in terms of the outcomes for LAC and the financial viability is a clear area for future research.
- There was also a clearly identified role for EP to provide psychological support to professionals in terms of being able to effectively manage and contain the young people they support. This particularly applies to foster carers and schools.
- It is likely that the difficulties experienced children at the risk of entering care may be similar to children and young people who are labelled 'LAC' (Osborne, Norgate & Traill, 2009) and so follows that the findings from the current study may be helpful in understanding what supports their learning also. Further it reasonable to suggest that this is also an area in which EP's could make a potentially positive contribution.
- It is important to note that whilst the researcher has presented the facilitative and inhibitive mechanisms in the CMO models separately this is for visual representation only in terms of the 'ideal' contextual environments. These mechanisms are fluid and dynamic in nature and so it follows that their presence or absence can co-exist to greater or lesser extents and are changeable over time. It was not within the scope of this study to assess the extent to which specific mechanisms have the potential to mediate inhibitive factors within a given context. This applies both within and between the contextual and facilitative/inhibitive mechanisms identified within this study. For example, to what extent does the presence of positive relationships with a range of factors limit the impact of negative peer relationships. Equally, to what

extent does prioritising education and having a long term educational plan for the young person limit or mediate the negative effects of placement instability. As such, clearly identifies a potential area for future research.

- Yardley (2008) argues that since context can share some features even if other features are quite dissimilar, generalisability in qualitative research is potential wide-ranging and flexible. In line with this, it is hoped that although the findings from this study may not be exactly replicated in any other sample or context insights derived from this study can be usefully applied in other similar contexts to inform educational practice in relation to LAC (Yardley, 2008). Again the validity of the AEL model to other contexts is another possible direction for future research.

## 5.8 PERSONAL REFLECTION

Writing the thesis in particular has been a very personal process for me and at times has tested my resilience in terms of my personal motivations for starting this program and also choosing the topic of looked after children. At first the decision to research LAC emanated from a local authority priority area however what essentially emerged as I immersed myself in the research and in the experiences of the young people and the professionals who work to support them was a genuine curiosity about the human experience and the realisation that through conducting this research I gained a personal insight into very personal experiences which is a very privileged position to be in.

## 5.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter sought to link the findings of this study to the research questions posed by this study and to existing literature concerning the education of children in care at Key Stage 4. The distinctive contribution of this current study was the emergence of the AEL model which provides a novel way of trying to understand the ways in which professionals can work to

support the educational progress of LAC. This model not only presents a theoretical understanding of the data but also explicitly outlines key facilitative and inhibitive contextual and individual mechanisms which may act to support or impede the educational progress of LAC. As such it provides professionals with a practical insight into how to support progress of LAC. In addition, as previously highlighted, this model may have applications beyond LAC and could extend to children at risk of entering care. The AEL model presented in this study represents a starting point or initial direction upon which future research can build upon.

(Word Count: 39,963)



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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS STUDY

A number of research and subject specific terms are used throughout this thesis. Therefore to provide the reader with clarity these have been defined, in alphabetical order, below:

**Context:** In this study 'Context' refers the social conditions in which mechanisms operate. They refer more generally to situational or system level processes and can, for example, relate to psychological concepts such as attitudes and beliefs or relate to physical attributes such as resources and living conditions.

**Context, Mechanism, Outcome Model (CMO):** It is an explanatory model within a realist philosophical framework and was developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997). A CMO model is a visual representation of the researcher's theoretical refinement and understanding (hypotheses) of the patterns of interaction between mechanisms operating within specific contextual conditions on a specified outcome., it is not expected that the CMO will provide all possible configurations; instead it represents a model which can be a source of further theoretical refinement.

**Critical Realism:** Critical realism is a philosophical approach associated with Roy Bhaskar. Critical realism recognises the significance of the individual's perception of a particular experience whilst also being sensitive to the impact of the wider social and contextual affects upon these interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words critical realists support the validity of the ways in which people make sense of their personal experiences however this approach also suggests that there is a 'reality' which is independent of our thinking or processing of the experience.



**Epistemology:** A philosophical term which concerns what can be considered 'knowledge' within a particular field of inquiry. It concerns the scope and validity of this 'knowledge'.

**Grounded Theory:** Grounded Theory is a methodological approach originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It is an inductive method of data collection and through an amalgamation of concepts within the data allows the researcher to produce of a theoretical understanding of the data. There have been several revisions to the GT method which impact on how we understand the methodology (see Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The GT approach utilized in this study is in line with Corbin and Strauss (2008).

**Key Stage 4:** This is the final stage of secondary education in the UK educational system in which 15-16 year olds are required to sit national examinations.

**Mechanism:** An underlying causal process which acts in context to influence an outcome. In the context of the current study a 'mechanism' is an individual factor which can positively or negatively influence and outcome (sometimes in the context of an interaction with other mechanisms and contextual influences).

**Ontology:** The philosophical study of reality i.e. is there an objective reality which can be observed and pursued and measured through research, or is reality constructed through language and human interaction, or somewhere in between.

**Substantive Theory:** A 'substantive theory' can be understood within the context of GT as being a 'Theoretical Scheme' in which the point of study is within a specific context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that their study was

confined to the "articulation of work in hospitals to only one hospital because we were developing a substantive theory" (p. 151). Similarly, the current study, is confined to the articulation of educational progress of LAC in a single local authority context. To develop a 'formal theory' it would require the sampling of various organisations, types of work and contexts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

**Young Person:** The researcher uses the term 'young person' in this research to refer to LAC aged between 13 -17, unless otherwise stated.

## APPENDIX B: LITERATURE SEARCH TERMS, SEARCH DATES AND DATABASES USED

Date of Search	Search Terms	Database/s	Fields	No. of Results
27.03.2015	Achievement <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	SCIE	Achievement [All Fields] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [All Fields] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> united kingdom [Location] [including this term only] <b>AND</b> 'journal article' [Format Type]	148
27.03.2015	Emotional Wellbeing <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	SCIE	Emotional wellbeing [All Fields] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [All Fields] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> united kingdom [Location] [including this term only] <b>AND</b> 'journal article' [Format Type]	12
27.03.2015	Attainment <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	SCIE	Attainment [All Fields] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [All Fields] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> united kingdom [Location] [including this term only] <b>AND</b> 'journal article' [Format Type]	22

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Date of Search	Search Terms	Database/s	Fields	No. of Results
27.03.2015	Educational Psychology <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	SCIE	Educational Psychology [All Fields Exact] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [All Fields] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> united kingdom [Location] [including this term only] <b>AND</b> 'journal article' [Format Type]	24
27.03.2015	Achievement <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycARTICLES	Achievement [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> Peer Reviewed Journals	16
27.03.2015	Emotional Wellbeing <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycARTICLES	Emotional Wellbeing [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> Peer Reviewed Journals Narrowed by Age 13-17	14

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Date of Search	Search Terms	Database/s	Fields	No. of Results
27.03.2015	Attainment <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycARTICLES	Attainment [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> Peer Reviewed Journals	10
27.03.2015	Educational Psychology <b>AND</b> Looked After Children	PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycARTICLES	Educational Psychology [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> 'looked after children' [Select Field Option] <b>AND</b> '2004-2015' [Publication Year] <b>AND</b> Peer Reviewed Journals  Narrowed by Age 13-17	4

## APPENDIX C: LITERATURE EXCLUDED FROM THIS STUDY

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
More than the sum of its parts? inter-professional working in the education of looked after children.	Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2004). More than the sum of its parts? inter-professional working in the education of looked after children. <i>Children &amp; Society</i> , 18(3), 179-193	Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection	Excluded	Evaluation Project
Perspectives of Looked after Children on School Experience - a Study Conducted among Primary School Children in a Children's Home in Singapore.	Celeste, Y. S. C. (2011). Perspectives of Looked after Children on School Experience—a Study Conducted among Primary School Children in a Children's Home in Singapore. <i>Children &amp; Society</i> , 25(2), 139-150.	Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection	Excluded	Wrong age group; Not UK
(in)sufficient?: Ethnicity and foster care in english local authorities.	Kirton, D. (2014). (In) Sufficient?: ethnicity and foster care in English local authorities. <i>Child &amp; Family Social Work</i> .	PsycINFO	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on attainment within secondary education.
Adopted children and education: The experiences of a specialist CAMHS team.	Barratt, S. (2011). Adopted Children and Education: The experiences of a specialist CAMHS Team. <i>Clinical child psychology and psychiatry</i> , 1359104511403559.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Adopted children; Does not have a primary focus on attainment within secondary education.

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Children in residential care and school engagement or school 'dropout': What makes the difference in terms of policies and practices in England and France?	Denecheau, B. (2011). Children in residential care and school engagement or school 'dropout': what makes the difference in terms of policies and practices in England and France?. <i>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 16(3), 277-287.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Residential care;
Emotional well-being and mental health of looked after children in England.	McAuley, C., & Davis, T. (2009). Emotional well-being and mental health of looked after children in England. <i>Child &amp; Family Social Work</i> , 14(2), 147-155.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Focus is on Mental Health not education
Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: An investigation of two Scottish local authorities.	McClung, M., & Gayle, V. (2010). Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities. <i>Child &amp; Family Social Work</i> , 15(4), 409-431.	PsycINFO	Included	
Help-seeking by foster-carers for their 'looked after' children: The role of mental health literacy and treatment attitudes.	Bonfield, S., Collins, S., Guishard-Pine, J., & Langdon, P. E. (2009). Help-seeking by foster-carers for their 'looked after' children: The role of mental health literacy and treatment attitudes. <i>British Journal of Social Work</i> , bcp050.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Focus is on Mental Health not education
Incredible Years parent training support for foster carers in Wales: A multi-centre feasibility study.	Bywater, T., Hutchings, J., Linck, P., Whitaker, C., Daley, D., Yeo, S. T., & Edwards, R. T. (2011). Incredible Years parent training support for foster carers in Wales: a multi-centre feasibility study. <i>Child: care, health and development</i> , 37(2), 233-243.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Evaluation Project

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Institutional care: Associations between inattention and early reading performance.	Roy, P., & Rutter, M. (2006). Institutional care: Associations between inattention and early reading performance. <i>Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry</i> , 47(5), 480-487.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Doesn't have a primary focus on secondary education
Interpersonal childhood trauma and the use of the therapeutic community in recovery.	Cross, R. (2012). Interpersonal childhood trauma and the use of the therapeutic community in recovery. <i>Therapeutic Communities: The International Journal of Therapeutic Communities</i> , 33(1), 39-53.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Doesn't have a primary focus on secondary education
Invisible no more? Including lesbian, gay and bisexual people in social work and social care.	Fish, J. (2009). Invisible no more? Including lesbian, gay and bisexual people in social work and social care. <i>Practice: Social Work in Action</i> , 21(1), 47-64.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Doesn't have a primary focus on secondary education
Language and communication difficulties in juvenile offenders.	Fish, J. (2009). Invisible no more? Including lesbian, gay and bisexual people in social work and social care. <i>Practice: Social Work in Action</i> , 21(1), 47-64.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Doesn't have a primary focus on secondary education
Learn the Child--Helping Looked After Children to Learn: A Good Practice Guide for Social Workers, Carers and Teachers.	Cairns, K., & Stanway, C. (2004). <i>Learn the Child: Helping Looked After Children to Learn: a Good Practice Guide for Social Workers, Carers and Teachers</i> . BAAF.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Doesn't have a primary focus on secondary education



WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
More than a piece of paper?: Personal education plans and 'looked after' children in England.	Hayden, C. (2005). More than a piece of paper?: Personal education plans and 'looked after' children in England. <i>Child &amp; family social work, 10</i> (4), 343-352.	PsycINFO	Excluded	The focus of the paper is on the impact of the PEP regardless of Key Stage.
Observations of group care worker-child interaction in residential youth care: Pedagogical interventions and child behavior.	Bastiaanssen, I. L., Delsing, M. J., Geijsen, L., Kroes, G., Veerman, J. W., & Engels, R. C. (2014, April). Observations of Group Care Worker-Child Interaction in Residential Youth Care: Pedagogical Interventions and Child Behavior. In <i>Child &amp; Youth Care Forum</i> (Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 227-241). Springer US.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Doesn't have a primary focus on secondary education
Reflections on child welfare research and the policy process: Virtual school heads and the education of looked after children.	Berridge, D. (2012). Reflections on child welfare research and the policy process: Virtual school heads and the education of looked after children. <i>British Journal of Social Work, 42</i> (1), 26-41.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Theoretical Paper
Review of Educating difficult adolescents: Effective education for children in public care or with emotional and behavioural difficulties.	N/A	PsycINFO	Excluded	Review
Review of In Care and After. A Positive Perspective.	N/A	PsycINFO	Excluded	Review

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Review of Safeguarding children and schools.	N/A	PsycINFO	Excluded	Review
Schools and support staff: Applying the European pedagogic model.	Petrie, P. (2005). Schools and support staff: applying the European pedagogic model. <i>Support for learning</i> , 20(4), 176-180.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Discussion paper
Supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are looked after	Brewin, M., & Statham, J. (2011). Supporting the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are Looked After. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 27(4), 365-381.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Focus is on Transition from primary to secondary
Supporting vulnerable children and young people.	Kendall, S., & Kinder, K. (2007). Supporting vulnerable children and young people.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Not specific to LAC
The mental health, emotional literacy, cognitive ability, literacy attainment and 'resilience' of 'looked after children': A multidimensional, multiple-rater population based study.	Rees, P. (2013). The mental health, emotional literacy, cognitive ability, literacy attainment and 'resilience' of 'looked after children': A multidimensional, multiple-rater population based study. <i>British Journal of Clinical Psychology</i> , 52(2), 183-198.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Doesn't have a primary focus on secondary education; Related to resilience.

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Theory and explanation in child welfare: Education and looked-after children.	Berridge, D. (2007). Theory and explanation in child welfare: education and looked-after children. <i>Child &amp; family social work</i> , 12(1), 1-10.	PsycINFO	Excluded	Theoretical Paper
When lack of data is data: Do we really know who our looked-after children are?	Jacklin, A., Robinson, C., & Torrance, H. (2006). When lack of data is data: do we really know who our looked-after children are?. <i>European journal of special needs education</i> , 21(1), 1-20.	PsycINFO	Included	
Who Takes Care of Education 18 months on? A follow-up study of looked after children's perceptions of support for educational progress.	Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Akhurst, S., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2004). Who Takes Care of Education 18 months on? A follow-up study of looked after children's perceptions of support for educational progress. <i>Child &amp; family social work</i> , 9(3), 273-284.	PsycINFO	Included	
A 2-year follow-up of orphans' competence, socioemotional problems and post-traumatic stress symptoms in traditional foster care and orphanages in Iraqi Kurdistan	Ahmad, A., Qahar, J., Siddiq, A., Majeed, A., Rasheed, J., Jabar, F., & Von Knorring, A. L. (2005). A 2-year follow-up of orphans' competence, socioemotional problems and post-traumatic stress symptoms in traditional foster care and orphanages in Iraqi Kurdistan. <i>Child: Care, health and development</i> , 31(2), 203-215.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on attainment within secondary education; Not UK
A different class? educational attainment - the views and experiences of looked after young people	O'Hagan, P. (2004). <i>A Different Class?: Educational Attainment: the Views and Experiences of Looked After Young People</i> . Who Cares? Scotland.	SCIE Database	Excluded	A government consultation exercise and does not have a primary focus on attainment within secondary education.

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
A hidden population: understanding the needs of sexually abused and abusing children in substitute care	Pollock, S., & Farmer, E. (2005). A hidden population: understanding the needs of sexually abused and abusing children in substitute care. <i>Adoption &amp; Fostering</i> , 29(2), 18-32.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on attainment within secondary education.
Academic engagement and performance: estimating the impact of out-of-home care for maltreated children	Font, S., & Maguire-Jack, K. (2013). Academic engagement and performance: Estimating the impact of out-of-home care for maltreated children. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 35(5), 856-864.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on attainment within secondary education.
After a long-term placement: investigating educational achievement, behaviour, and transition to independent living	Dumaret, A. C., Donati, P., & Crost, M. (2011). After a Long-Term Placement: Investigating Educational Achievement, Behaviour, and Transition to Independent Living. <i>Children &amp; Society</i> , 25(3), 215-227.	SCIE Database	Excluded	French study
An asset account for looked after children: a proposal to improve educational outcomes for children in care	Maxwell, D., Sodha, S., & Stanley, K. (2006). An asset account for looked after children: A proposal to improve educational outcomes for children in care. <i>London: Institute for Public Policy Research Ofsted (2007) The Key Stage, 4.</i>	SCIE Database	Excluded	Not a investigative study
An examination of post-secondary retention and graduation among foster care youth enrolled in a four-year university	Day, A., Dworsky, A., Fogarty, K., & Damashek, A. (2011). An examination of post-secondary retention and graduation among foster care youth enrolled in a four-year university. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 33(11), 2335-2341.	SCIE Database	Excluded	American Study

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Aspirations: the views of foster children and their carers	Broad, B. (2008). <i>Aspirations: The Views of Foster Children and Their Carers: Full Research Report</i> . Adolescent and Children's Trust.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4
Barriers to cross-systems collaboration in child welfare, education, and the courts: supporting educational well-being of youth in care through systems change	Garstka, T. A., Lieberman, A., Biggs, J., Thompson, B., & Levy, M. M. (2014). Barriers to Cross-Systems Collaboration in Child Welfare, Education, and the Courts: Supporting Educational Well-being of Youth in Care Through Systems Change. <i>Journal of Public Child Welfare</i> , 8(2), 190-211.	SCIE Database	Excluded	American Study
Bridging the divide between education and social work in order to improve the prospects of looked after children	Halvorsen, T. (2014). Bridging the divide between education and social work in order to improve the prospects of looked after children. <i>Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care</i> , 13(2), 1-11.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4
Caregivers, school liaisons, and agency advocates speak out about the educational needs of children and youths in foster care	Zetlin, A., Weinberg, L., & Shea, N. M. (2010). Caregivers, school liaisons, and agency advocates speak out about the educational needs of children and youths in foster care. <i>Social work</i> , 55(3), 245-254.	SCIE Database	Excluded	American Study
Children in residential care and school engagement or school 'dropout': what makes the difference in terms of policies and practices in England and France	Repeat Paper	SCIE Database	Excluded	Repeat Paper

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Closing the gap: investigating the barriers to educational achievement for looked after children	O'Sullivan, A., & Westerman, R. (2007). Closing the gap: investigating the barriers to educational achievement for looked after children. <i>Adoption &amp; fostering</i> , 31(1), 13-20.	SCIE Database	Included	
Context matters: experimental evaluation of home-based tutoring for youth in foster care	Zinn, A., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Context matters: Experimental evaluation of home-based tutoring for youth in foster care. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 47, 198-204.	SCIE Database	Excluded	American Study
Developmental and cultural assets and resilient outcomes in First Nations young people in care: an initial test of an explanatory model	Filbert, K. M., & Flynn, R. J. (2010). Developmental and cultural assets and resilient outcomes in First Nations young people in care: An initial test of an explanatory model. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 32(4), 560-564.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Canadian Study
Disproportionality in education and employment outcomes of adult foster care alumni	Harris, M. S., Jackson, L. J., O'Brien, K., & Pecora, P. J. (2009). Disproportionality in education and employment outcomes of adult foster care alumni. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 31(11), 1150-1159.	SCIE Database	Excluded	American Study
Does subtype matter? Assessing the effects of maltreatment on functioning in preadolescent youth in out-of-home care	Petrenko, C. L., Friend, A., Garrido, E. F., Taussig, H. N., & Culhane, S. E. (2012). Does subtype matter? Assessing the effects of maltreatment on functioning in preadolescent youth in out-of-home care. <i>Child abuse &amp; neglect</i> , 36(9), 633-644.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Educating difficult adolescents: an evaluation of 'Quality protects'	Berridge, D., & Beecham, J. (2008). <i>Educating Difficult Adolescents: An Evaluation Of 'Quality Protects': Research Brief. DCSF: London.</i>	SCIE Database	Excluded	Residential care;
Educating difficult adolescents: effective education for children in public care or with emotional and behavioural difficulties	Dance, C., Beecham, J. K., Berridge, D., & Field, S. (2008). <i>Educating difficult adolescents: Effective education for children in public care or with emotional and behavioural difficulties.</i> Jessica Kingsley Publishers.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4. Includes SEBD. Generic focus.
Education and self-reliance among care leavers	Cameron, C. (2007). Education and self-reliance among care leavers. <i>Adoption &amp; Fostering</i> , 31(1), 39-49.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4. Is about self-reliance and this concept among LAC.
Education liaisons work to improve educational outcomes of foster youth: A mixed methods case study	Weinberg, L. A., Oshiro, M., & Shea, N. (2014). Education liaisons work to improve educational outcomes of foster youth: A mixed methods case study. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 41, 45-52.	SCIE Database	Excluded	American Study
Educational attainment of children and young people in the looked-after care system	Harland, L. (2014). Educational attainment of children and young people in the looked-after care system. <i>Community Practitioner</i> , 87(11), 25-27.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Focus is on the contribution school nurses and health visitors.

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities	Repeat Paper	SCIE Database	Included	Repeat Paper
How to reach 'hard to reach' children: improving access, participation and outcomes	Pomerantz, K., Hughes, M., & Thompson, D. (2007). <i>How to Reach'Hard to Reach'Children: Improving Access, Participation and Outcomes</i> . John Wiley & Sons.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Book
Identifying patterns of resilience using classification trees	Hobcraft, J., & Sigle-Rushton, W. (2009). Identifying patterns of resilience using classification trees. <i>Social Policy and Society</i> , 8(01), 87-98.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Focus is on Resilience
If the social worker had called at least it would show they cared'. Young care leaver's perspectives on the importance of care	Gaskell, C. (2010). 'If the Social Worker had Called at Least it Would Show they Cared'. Young Care Leaver's Perspectives on the Importance of Care. <i>Children &amp; Society</i> , 24(2), 136-147.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4
Improving the educational achievements of looked-after children	N/A	SCIE Database	Excluded	Executive Summary;



WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Improving the educational achievements of looked-after children: executive summary	N/A	SCIE Database	Excluded	Repeat Paper
Kinship care and “child-only” welfare grants: low participation despite potential benefits	Nelson, J. G., Gibson, P. A., & Bauer, J. W. (2010). Kinship care and “child-only” welfare grants: Low participation despite potential benefits. <i>Journal of Family Social Work</i> , 13(1), 3-24.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4
Looked after and learning: evaluation of the Virtual School Head pilot	Berridge, D. (2009). Looked after and learning: evaluation of the virtual school head pilot.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Evaluation Project
Looking beyond the label: public attitudes towards young people in care	Paper by the princes trust	SCIE Database	Excluded	Not a peer reviewed paper; Doesn't have a primary focus on educational attainment at KS4
Making a connection: school engagement of young people in care	Tilbury, C., Creed, P., Buys, N., Osmond, J., & Crawford, M. (2014). Making a connection: School engagement of young people in care. <i>Child &amp; Family Social Work</i> , 19(4), 455-466.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Making up lost ground: challenges in supporting the educational attainment of looked after children beyond Key Stage 4	Driscoll, J. (2011). Making up lost ground: Challenges in supporting the educational attainment of looked after children beyond Key Stage 4. <i>Adoption &amp; Fostering</i> , 35(2), 18-31.	SCIE Database	Included	
More than the sum of its parts? inter-professional working in the education of looked after children	Repeat Paper	SCIE Database	Excluded	Repeat Paper
Overlooked: children with disabilities in residential care	Trout, A. L., Casey, K., Chmelka, M. B., DeSalvo, C., Reid, R., & Epstein, M. H. (2009). Overlooked: Children with disabilities in residential care. <i>Child Welfare</i> , 88(2), 111-136.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Not focused on LAC education
Schooling and looked after children: exploring contexts and outcomes in Standard Attainment Tests (SATs)	Davey, D., & Pithouse, A. (2008). Schooling and Looked after Children: Exploring Contexts and Outcomes in Standard Attainment Tests (SATs). <i>Adoption &amp; Fostering</i> , 32(3), 60-72.	SCIE Database	Included	Included
Supporting care leavers to fulfil their educational aspirations: resilience, relationships and resistance to help	Driscoll, J. (2013). Supporting care leavers to fulfil their educational aspirations: resilience, relationships and resistance to help. <i>Children &amp; Society</i> , 27(2), 139-149.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Taking care of education: an evaluation of the education of looked after children	Harker, R., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2004). <i>Taking Care of Education: An evaluation of the education of looked after children</i> . Jessica Kingsley Publishers.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Book
The association between length of stay in residential care and educational achievement: results from 5- and 16-year follow-up studies	Ringle, J. L., Ingram, S. D., & Thompson, R. W. (2010). The association between length of stay in residential care and educational achievement: Results from 5- and 16-year follow-up studies. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 32(7), 974-980.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Residential care;
The educational attainment of looked after children - local authority pilot projects: final research report	Connelly, G., Forrest, J., Furnivall, J., Siebelt, L., Smith, I., & Seagraves, L. (2008). The educational attainment of looked after children-local authority pilot projects: Final Research Report.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4
The educational attainment of looked after children and young people	Thomas, H. V. (2012). The educational attainment of looked after children and young people.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4
The general health, social networks and lifestyle behaviours of young people looked after by local authorities in Scotland	Meltzer, H., & Lader, D. (2005). The General Health, Social Networks and Lifestyle Behaviours of Young People Looked After by Local Authorities in Scotland. <i>Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care</i> , 4(1), 1.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Does not have a primary focus on Education at Key stage 4

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Title	Author/Reference	Sourced	Included/excluded	Inclusion/exclusion reason
Theory and explanation in child welfare: education and looked-after children	Berridge, D. (2007). Theory and explanation in child welfare: education and looked-after children. <i>Child &amp; family social work</i> , 12(1), 1-10.	SCIE Database	Excluded	Theoretical Paper

## APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

### Draft Interview Schedule Year 12

Introduction from the researcher:

So [NAME] thanks for meeting with me again. Just to refresh your memory, today I was hoping to think with you about what things you might have found helpful/unhelpful in your learning in school so far. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers and that I am interested in your views.

As mentioned before I will be recording today's session so that I have a good record of what is said – is this still okay?

*Gives reminder of right to withdraw during the interview, immediately afterwards or by [date] and can stop interview at any time. Child will be reminded of right to anonymity*

### Warm up questions

Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?

Start recording interview...

1. Firstly I thought it might be really helpful if you told me a little bit about yourself for example some of the things that you're interested in?
2. What things do you enjoy/not enjoy about school? (will be asked separately) Prompts:
  - What do you enjoy the most about [participant's response]
  - Who else is involved in [participant's response]
  - Have you always found [participant's response] enjoyable?
3. How much do you enjoy school?
  - A lot; A little; Not very much

### Perception of progress

4. Overall can you tell me how would you rate your educational during year 10 & 11? Would you say things went well or not so well? Prompts
  - What makes you say that?
5. Could you tell me about how you felt at the started your GCSE'S

Prompts:

- Why do you think you felt that way?
- How would you have liked things to be?

- How would it look if things were different?
6. Could you tell me a bit about how you felt after you had finished?
- What things were different if any?
  - What do you helped things to be different

### **Motivation**

7. Overall how motivated would you say are you about your education
- Very motivated; A little motivated; Not very motivated; Not motivated at all
  - Has this changed since finished your KS4 exams?
  - What would make you more motivated?
  - What stops you being more motivated?
8. What sort of incentives did you have to do well in school?
- Were they helpful
  - What do you think would be a good incentive

### **Relationships**

9. Can you tell me about your friendships at school/outside of school?
- What sorts of things do you do together have in common?
  - In what ways did your friends provide support for you, if any?
10. Who was your favourite member of staff?
- Can you tell me a bit about why this was

### **Boundaries**

11. How did you find the rules in school?
- What rule if any would you change and why?

### **Resources**

12. Could you tell me about a positive experience that you had in Years 10 & 11?
- What in particular made this experience positive for you
  - What thing encouraged you
  - Who else was involved
  - Were they helpful? If so, in what way?
  - Is there anything they might have done differently
  - Have they helped before with things

13. Could you tell me about an experience in school that you have found difficult during years 10 & 11?

- What things in particular made this experience difficult for you
- Has this happened before
- Who else was involved
- In what way were they helpful/unhelpful
- What was the outcome
- What would you have liked to have seen done differently
- Was there anything else that supported you

14. Overall what would you say has supported your education the most?

15. Overall what would you say has been a barrier?

16. Overall do you think your educational experience could have been improved- a lot or a little?

- Why would you say a little/lot

17. What do you think would help to improve your experiences of education?

### **Support mechanisms**

18. What types of support have you had access to from:

- Staff at school?
- Professionals who support you
- Your foster carer

19. How helpful have your personal educational plans been? Very helpful, a little helpful, not very helpful, not helpful at all

20. How involved did you feel you were in your PEP? Very involved, a little involved not very involved, not involved at all.

- Why would you say that

21. How did you feel that about your ability to openly express your opinions/views

22. What additional support is available to you that you are aware of in relation to:

- Education
- Emotional support

23. If you needed support who would go to?

- About your Learning- why them?
- About how you were feeling i.e. upset or angry- why them?

### **Aspirations**

24. What would you like to achieve academically in the future?

- Who have you talked to about your goals
- How do you think you might achieve these things

### **Debriefing**

During the debriefing the participant:

- Thanked for their participation
- Will be asked to share how they felt during the interview and whether they have any questions. This will be guided by the participant's responses.
- Reminded of processes relating to how their info will be used and their right to withdraw and of date
- Will be given an opportunity to choose a pseudonym
- Reminded of the research summary
- Reminded to speak with DT if they have any further questions that arise after the meeting and would like to meet with me at a later date



## APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PROFESSIONALS

### Draft Interview Schedule Professionals

Start recording interview...

25. Firstly could you tell me about what your role involves?
26. What do you think is the most important part of your role in terms of supporting the Education of LAC at KS4?
  - Why would you say that?
27. Can you tell me about a successful case?
  - Who else was involved
  - Were they helpful? If so, in what way?
  - Is there anything they might have done differently
  - Have they helped before with things
28. Can you tell me about a difficult case?
  - What would you do differently
29. Can you tell me about the roles of other professionals you liaise with and what you have found helpful/unhelpful?
30. What sort of incentives did you have to do well in school?
  - Were they helpful
  - What do you think would be a good incentive
31. How do you view your role in terms of relationships with young people you work with
32. Overall what would you say has supported your education the most?
33. Overall what would you say are the primary barriers to education at KS4?
34. What do you think would help to improve the experiences of education at KS4?

### Support mechanisms

35. What types of support have do young people have access to?

- Education
- Emotional support

36. How effective is this support?

37. How helpful have personal educational plans been? Very helpful, a little helpful, not very helpful, not helpful at all

38. How involved are the young people in the PEP? Very involved, a little involved not very involved, not involved at all.

- Why would you say that

39. How are the opinions/views or decisions of young people involved in your work?

40. How are young people's aspirations managed or incorporated into the local authority's practice?

#### Debriefing

During the debriefing the participant:

- Thanked for their participation
- Will be asked to share how they felt during the interview and whether they have any questions. This will be guided by the participant's responses.
- Reminded of processes relating to how their info will be used and their right to withdraw and of date
- Will be given an opportunity to choose a pseudonym
- Reminded of the research summary
- Reminded to speak with DT if they have any further questions that arise after the meeting and would like to meet with me at a later date

## APPENDIX F: DISTRESS MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL

### Protocol for managing distress during the interview

#### Pre- interview measures

- The researcher will gain a full awareness of the issues, relating to the research questions, surrounding the child before conducting the interview by liaising with the Designated Teacher for LAC and the young person's social worker i.e. the interview schedule will be discussed. The researcher will not attempt to counsel participants directly.

#### In interview measures

- Before conducting the research with participants the researcher will agree with them what arrangements for support they would like to be made both during and after the research should they become distressed.
- The young person will be reminded of their right to withdraw from research and retrospectively withdraw consent will be explicitly discussed and made clear at the beginning and end of the research process.
- The researcher will adopt a child-centred approach that allows the process to proceed at their pace and under their control i.e. having short breaks if they need them.
- If participants want to stop the interview they will be given the opportunity to stop completely or complete the remainder of the interview at a later date.
- Participants will be advised that they will have an opportunity to discuss any experiences they may want to communicate beyond the interview. This will be discussed sensitively and agreed with the young person about how this can be fed back to a member of staff that they are comfortable with.
- The researcher will be sensitive to non-verbal cues such as changes in body language and signs of discomfort. He will check in with the young person that they are happy to continue or whether they would like to have a break. Where a longer break is warranted the participant will have an opportunity to reschedule the interview and be encouraged to discuss their concerns with the DT or another adult they are comfortable with to ensure that they are comfortable to still engage with the interview at a later date. This will be checked before second half of the interview commences.

#### Post-interview measures

- During the debriefing at the end of the interview the researcher will inform participants of avenues of support, such as the contact details of possible services that they can contact i.e. counselling services or the Educational psychology services.
- Participants will also be encouraged to make contact with the DT should they become experience any distress post-debriefing.

APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE OF UNDERSTANDING CAUSALITY 'WHO, WHAT, CONDITIONS AND CONSEQUENCES'

Empowerment & Disempowerment (Please note that this concept changed over time i.e. sat under 'Hearing LAC')							
Axial Code	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence	Participant Examples
Decision Making	The young person can be empowered in their decision making	When they are perceived as being competent by adults	Individual professionals, family and within the MA team	The YP demonstrates or the Professionals/adults perceive the YP to have strong potential.	The YP comes across as serious and as having a plan for their life.	This then leads to higher expectations, working hard to facilitate the YP.	<i>"I can understand this young person has a big potential he comes across as serious he has a plan for his life you know he has a vision and we have to facilitate that we have to really work hard we have to reflect that in the PEP"</i> P5
Decision Making	The young person can be empowered in their decision making	When they have an awareness of their own potential and know what they want from life and from themselves.	Within the individual YP	Because when you discover your potential you become engaged in something you know that you have the capacity to achieve or do well in. There is choice.	This can be facilitated by the professionals around the YP through discussions and opportunities for exploration. It can also be part of a developmental process	Learning feels better. The YP can engage more with education. The YP feels as though they have options. It can have a positive impact on motivation.	<i>"Once you discover your potential or your area of giftedness you don't struggle, because you are engaged in or doing something that you have all the inner resources for"</i> P3  <i>"it's not like you're not forced to in one path"</i> P2  <i>'But I'm coming into my own and that is making learning better because I am starting to realise what I want to do and how I want to do it. And if I want to make it difficult for myself that's my choice if I want to make it easier for myself that's my choice...so yeah.'</i> P1

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Empowerment & Disempowerment (Please note that this concept changed over time i.e. sat under 'Hearing LAC')							
Axial Code	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence	Participant Examples
Decision Making	The young person can be empowered in their decision making	When they are provided with explanations	Between the adult and the YP	The YP person's decision may not always be reflected in the overall outcome or decision but the YP should know why this is.	They are provided with an explanation	The YP has a better understanding of the process and why something was done.	<i>"I think it's about trying to take their views on board but also trying to explain to them why things have happened because I think a lot of information we get back from our care leavers is that decisions happen without anyone really telling them why they happened, if that makes sense?" P6</i>
	The young person can be disempowered in their decision making	They lack confidence	In wider social situations or meetings with adults	The environment or situation invokes a degree of anxiety in the YP. They do not feel confident about expressing their views	Imbalance between the YP and Adults dynamic	The YP does not speak up/ remains silent or less vocal. Avoids the situation altogether.	<i>"I missed a day because I was sick but I was too scared to ring in that I was sick coz it was only my second day it was only my second day at the job and I was sick...I mean I was really sick but I was scared to ring in because it looks really, really bad so like I turned my phone off for the day and then I came in the next day " P2</i>  <i>"Some of them do not always have the, the confidence to voice out their opinions in the presence of so many adults [referring to MA team meetings] " P3</i>
	The young person can be disempowered in their decision making	When they are perceived as being less competent by adults	Individual professionals, family and within the MA team	View you as being "just another kid" P2	People say you're just being silly or they don't take your views seriously	YP person feels disempowered. Negative relationship with the professional continues. YP's	<i>"Erm to be fair I'll tell my mum who talks to him quite often and but erm to be honest I tell quite a lot of other people but it's just erm...they just sort of think that I'm another</i>

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Empowerment & Disempowerment (Please note that this concept changed over time i.e. sat under 'Hearing LAC')							
Axial Code	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence	Participant Examples
						personal agency is reduced.	<i>kid like obviously like I guess no-one is supposed to like their social worker... Like I have said that I wanna change social worker erm I've said that to my mum but my mum's just said 'oh you're just being silly'. So I think erm a lot of people just don't take me seriously about it but like um I really don't like him." P2</i>
Decision Making	The young person can be disempowered in their decision making	They lack self awareness	Within themselves	Lack of opportunities to explore what it is they want to do. It is also developmental and there are individual differences within this.	Developmental. Can be facilitated by professionals	YP can become disengaged, be bored, become unsure of what it is that they want to pursue	<i>'[My Role] is to help these young people to discover themselves" P3 "self awareness is the first step towards discovering your pathway in life" P3</i>  <i>"I would say not...I would say erm not knowing what I want to do has been a barrier because it means I couldn't really pursue anything at length. So like I'd start something and then I'd get bored and finish because I wasn't genuinely interested in it. So I would say me myself not knowing what I wanted to do has really not helped. Erm I think that's like the biggest barrier of all." P2</i>

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Empowerment & Disempowerment (Please note that this concept changed over time i.e. sat under 'Hearing LAC')							
Axial Code	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence	Participant Examples
Decision Making	The young person can be disempowered in their decision making	When perceived as being unable to make the right decision	When the stakes are high	It is felt that the young person's decision may not be the correct one and may lead to a negative outcome.	Labelled as not being able to cope, confused and as incapable by professionals.	Professionals try to persuade the YP into a particular choice. YP feels as though they were not given opportunities for independence and make their own mistakes.	<p><i>"If they were given the option they [YP] might not have picked that would have been the best school for them [the YP]."</i> P4</p> <p><i>"And I think at first the YP did have a different school in mind, it was one of the bigger schools that didn't fare to well with of our other children previously, so I think we kind of tried to persuade them."</i> P4</p> <p><i>'So coming back to Social Services not thinking that young people can cope, we're very labelled as incapable...However Social Services failed to give us that inch to grow, that space, that room to actually prove to them that we're not all of us are incapable.'</i> P1</p>

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Empowerment & Disempowerment (Please note that this concept changed over time i.e. sat under 'Hearing LAC')							
Axial Code	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence	Participant Examples
Individual Capacities of the YP	The YP can cope	When they are supported with resilience skills. When they have confidence and have good self-esteem.	Within themselves	YP people in care have experienced traumatic experiences. It is important to help them understand that they can overcome these experiences and still succeed.	Professional support. Having access to a significant adult.	The YP is able to access learning , they feel more supported, they are able to overcome difficulties and succeed	<p><i>'One of the key things that I see my role as fulfilling is to help these people to develop resilience whatever experiences they have had in the past which has traumatised them and damaged them yes" P3</i></p> <p><i>"...does not necessarily need to determine their life trajectory...yes ...they can develop the resilience to overcome and to manage whatever their situation is and even come out stronger. " P3</i></p> <p><i>"you know and we were just able to you know work round stuff I mean 'Staff Member A' is just amazing I don't what I would have done without here really. She helped to apply for the job I'm doing now otherwise I don't think I would have got it she helped with C.V's, covering letters...yeah I think this is the best support. " P2</i></p> <p><i>'Coz I think you know if a child is confident and feels good about themselves then sometimes they are able to actually overcome some of these issues and difficulties that they are faced with, they are able to overcome them easier because they feel a degree of self-value" P4</i></p>



WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Empowerment & Disempowerment (Please note that this concept changed over time i.e. sat under 'Hearing LAC')							
Axial Code	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence	Participant Examples
Voice of the Young person	The voice of the YP is impacted	There is a strong commitment/lack of commitment to listening to the views of the YP	At an individual, whole school or organisation level. adults or professionals supporting the YP	This has an impact on the focus that placed on it.	The culture of the school in terms of how they view the voice of the YP is changed.	The young person has more or less of an opportunity to be heard and influence the type of support and intervention they receive.	<p><i>"I think that those who make the policies and procedures they've got some understanding but when it comes down to doing the one-to-one work or understanding it's not a resistance but it's almost like the policies in place for our children needs to be individual and I think the voice of the child needs to be incorporated more, I mean it is in some respects, but not really. I think we need to get better at listening to our young people" P6</i></p> <p><i>"At our school, I can't speak for other schools, but our school prides itself on its inclusive value and we do take on every student into consideration in terms of need. " P8</i></p> <p><i>"but if they need certain things and they are feeling certain ways and we are not listening to them how can we then expect them to perform in the best way possible to make sure they are coming into school every day to be engaged to take their exams"P8</i></p>

WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

Empowerment & Disempowerment (Please note that this concept changed over time i.e. sat under 'Hearing LAC')							
Axial Code	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence	Participant Examples
		The YP is more/less able to express their views and has an understanding of what it is they actually want and need.	Within the context of a professional or school environment, individual or group situation.	They don't know what type of support they need so they can't articulate this. It is hard to do when you are in a difficult emotional space. The environment is adult led.	Adults dictate the agenda. There isn't an awareness of the YP emotional state and then facilitated.	Can put pressure on the YP. You don't get the right type of support or "True Support".	<p><i>'...however the true support comes from knowing what you want and as a teenager you're very confused. You don't know what you want when you're in that emotional state.'</i> P1</p> <p><i>"Coz like obviously on there you'll set goals and stuff and obviously you can't like set your own goals obviously it's done with professionals and so they'd be like 'okay by August we want you doing this and that,' and I feel like it puts a lot of pressure on you...and like yeah no one knows you better than yourself and I just feel like if they're writing it they don't know you as well..."</i> P2</p>

## APPENDIX H: EXAMPLE OF AXIAL CODING

Axial Code	Code Memo	Open Codes (Within this Axial Code)	Participant Examples
Educational Choices	<p>This describes the extent to which having only one route which can be defined as being successful can be limiting. How does this impact on choice? Is it choice? At times LAC do not progress at in line with their peers and more importantly make the necessary progress in time for their GCSE exams. However, they can still achieve successful outcomes if support is continued.</p> <p>There is strong coverage, as I write this, about students getting good GCSE results but what about those who don't? GCSEs are both a passport to future success and a barrier to future success it seems.</p> <p>It is important for all children to have options and alternatives within education which are of equal value in terms of rigour and respect and in terms of providing opportunities for future success and positive outcomes upon their completion.</p>	<p>Grades as a Barrier</p> <p>Thinking beyond KS4</p> <p>Which Route? Academic vs. Vocational Education</p> <p><u>Sub-codes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Academic Rigour and Respect</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What does Academic Education offer?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What does Vocational Education offer?</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>"...I swear I needed something like an A or something and I only had a C and so I was like "I can't do that subject now"." P2</i></p> <p><i>"...emotionally I'm not ready yet and I'm still playing catch up hence I'm still on a GCSE." P1</i></p> <p><i>"...if we continue with the support of children who have not succeeded at KS4 we can eventually pull them around as they get older." P7</i></p> <p><i>"...I wanted to do hair and beauty but my school were like you're too smart for that..." P2</i></p>

At this stage we see a move towards axial code memo's which describe 'process' capturing the relationships between the category and sub-codes in terms of actions/interactions, context and outcomes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## APPENDIX I: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### INFORMED CONSENT

In the current study, consent gained from the young person's guardians was, as far as possible, triggered only after a decision to/not to participate in the research had been made by the young person. The young person was not approached by the researcher directly instead the research was explained to the young person by the DT who then communicated the young person's decision. This was in place to reinforce the view that young people are not passive recipients in research and are viewed as being active agents who have personal agency over decisions that affect them (Winter, 2006).

BPS guidelines (2014) state that when conducting research with vulnerable populations i.e. LAC psychologists should ensure that participants:

*"... are given ample opportunity to understand the nature, purpose and anticipated outcomes of any research participation, so that they may give consent to the extent that their capabilities allow. Methods that maximise the understanding and ability to consent of such vulnerable persons to give informed consent should be used whenever possible" (p. 31)*

In this study participants were provided with two distinct opportunities to have the research explained to them. In the first instance the DT explained the research and this was subsequently consolidated at a meeting with the researcher, separate from the interview, to discuss the study.

With regard to the professionals involved in this study, they were provided with an information sheet prior to meeting with the researcher to discuss the study. This allowed

them to develop an initial understanding of what the research involved before having an opportunity to discuss the study in full with the researcher.

## ANONYMITY

Parker (2008) highlights that research can never 'truly' be confidential since researchers inevitably seek to disseminate their discoveries. In addition, when conducting research safeguarding the participant must be weighed against the cost of limiting their willingness to confide in the interviewer (Munro, 2001). Therefore the researcher favoured 'anonymity' over 'confidentiality' in this study and the limitations of confidentiality were explained to the participants before they became involved.

In the study the researcher anonymised the details of the participants, schools and other named professionals so that all features which could lead to the identification of participants were minimised. The researcher saved a master copy of participants and associated pseudonyms and this was stored on a password protected computer at the LA. As previously highlighted (see Methodology, Section 3.7), minimal details about the professionals participating in this study have been provided to further support their anonymity in this study, and in doing so, hopefully increasing their ability to speak openly and honestly about their experiences.

Consent was sought from all participants to use anonymised quotes from the interviews in any published reports or presentations of the analysis. Participants were able to take part in the research whilst declining consent to have anonymised quotes used in the study. Participants were informed that the interview would remain completely anonymous unless the researcher felt that what was shared meant that there was a potential risk of harm to them or others. However, participants were reassured that in a situation where information

needed to be passed to another adult they would be informed that these actions were being taken by the researcher.

## WITHDRAWAL

Participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the research two months after the interview. Participants were advised to let the designated teacher for LAC at their school know who in turn informed the researcher. A timeline of two months following the interview for withdrawal was implemented due to the nature concurrent data collection and analysis within GT and within the required timeframes for this course.

## DATA PROTECTION

Information was handled and stored in line with the Data Protection Act (1998). Information was stored on a password protected computer or encrypted USB memory stick. Transcripts were stored electronically as above. Transcripts may be stored for up-to two years following submission of the research thesis.

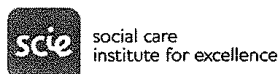
## RISK OF HARM

Taking part in the research may provoke feelings of anxiety or discomfort for some participants. Participants were encouraged to share what they were comfortable with and informed that they could stop the interview at any time without question. The 'distress management protocol' implemented in this study has been included in Appendix F.

An allocated slot for a full debrief was protected and did not involve any information concerning performance. Participants were made aware of the debriefing slot prior to interview. During the debriefing the researcher will inform participants of possible avenues

of support, such as the contact details of possible services that they can contact i.e. counselling services or the Educational psychology services. Participants were encouraged to make contact with the DT should they become experience any distress post-debriefing. Participants will be advised that they can raise potential complaints regarding any aspect of the research via the DT in the school. They were reassured that this would not adversely affect them in any way.

## APPENDIX J: ETHICAL APPROVAL CONFIRMATION



**Social Care REC**  
An NRES Research Ethics Committee

24 October 2014

Mr Loxley Simmonds  
Doctoral Student  
Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
120 Belsize Lane  
London  
NW3 5BA

Dear Mr Simmonds

<b>Study title:</b>	<b>What Factors Support or Hinder the Educational Progress of Looked After Children (LAC) at KS4: A Grounded Theory Approach</b>
<b>REC reference:</b>	<b>14/IEC08/1013</b>
<b>IRAS project ID:</b>	<b>161788</b>
<b>Ethical opinion:</b>	<b>Favourable (with conditions)</b>

Thank you for your letter of 09 October 2014, responding to the Committee's request for further information on the above research and submitting revised documentation.

The further information was considered in correspondence by a Sub-Committee of the REC during the week commencing 20 October 2014. A list of the Sub-Committee members' is attached.

We plan to publish your research summary wording for the above study on the HRA website, together with your contact details. Publication will be no earlier than three months from the date of this opinion letter. Should you wish to provide a substitute contact point, require further information, or wish to make a request to postpone publication, please contact the REC Co-ordinator, Barbara Cuddon, [Barbara.Cuddon@scie.org.uk](mailto:Barbara.Cuddon@scie.org.uk)

**Discussion**

Although many of the issues raised by the Committee have been addressed a number still remain:

Consent process

- The Sub-Committee were unclear why the researchers are being made aware of the carers' details as the teacher is sending out the letters. The researchers' therefore only need to know the names of children whose parents have given permission to approach them.

206 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 6AQ  
Tel 0207 535 0900 Fax 020 7535 0901 [www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)  
SCIE is a charity registered in England and Wales Reg. No. 1092778 Company Reg. No.



- The Sub-Committee would like further clarification about the consent process. They could not see any justification for obtaining consent from both social workers and foster carers. Ethically, it may be acceptable for foster carers to give consent, but the Committee feels that in practice foster carers will not be able (or be willing) to give consent for the child to take part in the research. It is the Committee's understanding that social workers will need to be asked for consent (as representatives of the Director of Children Services) in cases where the local authority has parental responsibility. In other cases birth parents will have to be asked to consent. Consequently, the Committee asks that you check the consent process with Children Services and confirm their approval before the research can commence.
- If birth parents have to be asked for consent, you need to establish their capacity to give consent. If they lack capacity, you will need to take advice from the social workers as to obtaining consent for children to take part.
- The Sub-Committee recommend that the children are approached to give their consent first, if they have the capacity to do so, with parental/foster parent consent then being sought. The Sub-Committee were unclear why the researchers are being made aware of the carers' details as the teacher is sending out the letters. The researchers' therefore only need to know the names of children whose parents have given permission to approach them.

#### Information sheet for young people

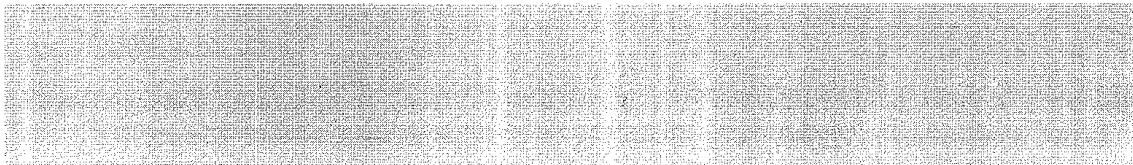
The sub-committee considered this information sheet still inappropriate for young people, they are still too wordy. Produce an information sheet suitable for young people. Use the guidance produced by the HRA/NRES to produce an acceptable version. Add details that the young person can be accompanied to the meeting with the researcher by an adult of their choice.

#### Information sheet for parents

This information sheet should stress that the letter is being passed on by the school and that the researcher has not been given their contact details i.e. names and addresses of the parents.

#### Distress process

The Sub-Committee considered support for those in immediate distress had not been thought through. If young people become distressed during the interview the researcher needs a process and skills to be able to handle this difficult situation. For example,



stopping the interview and asking them if they need a break, finding out if they would like to stop the interview now and continue at a later date, asking if they would like the researcher to find somebody who could support them.

The Sub-Committee recommend that you consult your supervisor to devise practical strategies on the issues of information provision and distress management.

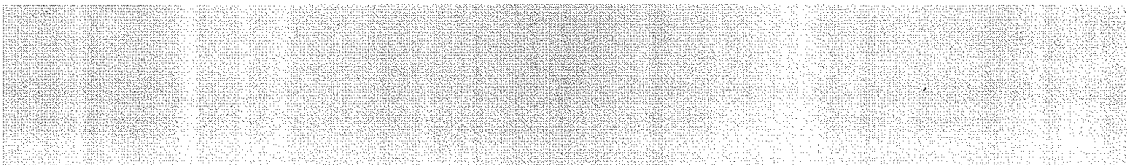
#### **Confirmation of ethical opinion**

On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation as revised, subject to the conditions specified below.

#### **Conditions of the favourable opinion**

The favourable opinion is subject to the following conditions being met prior to the start of the study.

1. Researchers are not given the carers' details. Revise documentation accordingly and forward this to the Sub-Committee.
2. Check the consent process with Children Services and confirm their approval before the research can commence. Forward a letter confirming their approval. Revise documentation accordingly and forward this to the Committee.
3. Develop a protocol for assessing the capacity of birth parents who need to be asked for consent. If they lack capacity you will need to take advice from the social workers as to obtaining consent for children to take part.
4. Revise the consent process so that those children with the capacity to do so are approached to give their consent first, if they have the capacity to do so, with further relevant consent then being sought. Forward revised documentation.
5. Revise the information sheet for young people to make it more appropriate. Use the guidance produced by the HRA/NRES available at - <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/consent/> to produce an acceptable version. This website provides links to other organisations for advice and guidance on producing information sheets and consent forms for young people. Add details that the young person can be accompanied to the meeting with the researcher by an adult of their choice.
6. Add to the information sheet for parents that the letter is being passed on by the school and that the researcher has not been given their contact details i.e. names



and addresses of the parents.

7. Develop a strategy and process for dealing with the immediate distress of the children during the interview. Forward details of this to the Committee.
8. Consult your supervisor to devise practical strategies on the issues of information provision and distress management.

**You should notify the REC in writing once all conditions have been met (except for site approvals from host organisations) and provide copies of any revised documentation with updated version numbers. The REC will acknowledge receipt and provide a final list of the approved documentation for the study, which can be made available to host organisations to facilitate their permission for the study. Failure to provide the final versions to the REC may cause delay in obtaining permissions.**

Management permission or approval must be obtained from each host organisation prior to the start of the study at the site concerned.

Management permission ("R&D approval") should be sought from all NHS organisations involved in the study in accordance with NHS research governance arrangements.

Guidance on applying for NHS permission for research is available in the Integrated Research Application System or at <http://www.rdforum.nhs.uk>.

Where a NHS organisation's role in the study is limited to identifying and referring potential participants to research sites ("participant identification centre"), guidance should be sought from the R&D office on the information it requires to give permission for this activity.

For non-NHS sites, site management permission should be obtained in accordance with the procedures of the relevant host organisation.

Guidance on Research Governance approval is available from the Department of Health supported Research Governance Framework: Resource Pack for Social Care (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, April 2010) London, which can be found at:  
<http://www.researchregister.org.uk/files/RGFGuidancepack2010.pdf>

Sponsors are not required to notify the Committee of approvals from host organisations

**It is the responsibility of the sponsor to ensure that all the conditions are complied with before the start of the study or its initiation at a particular site (as applicable).**

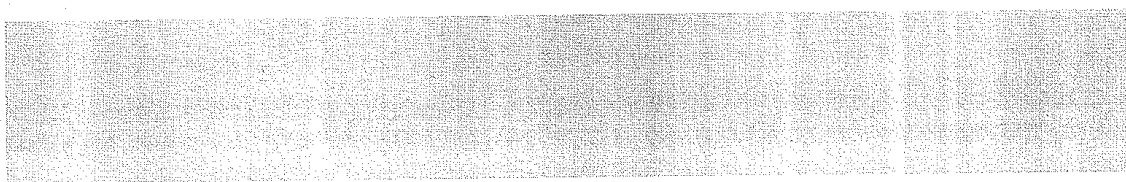
**Approved documents**

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

<i>Document</i>	<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>
Evidence of Sponsor insurance or indemnity (non NHS Sponsors only) [Contract with Sponsor]		
Interview schedules or topic guides for participants [Interview Schedule]		
IRAS Checklist XML [Checklist_14082014]		14 August 2014
IRAS Checklist XML [Checklist_13102014]		13 October 2014
IRAS Checklist XML [Checklist_13102014]		13 October 2014
Other [Safeguarding Protocol (Sharing information)]	Version 1	13 October 2014
Other [Consent Form- Headteacher]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [Tavistock Sponsor Confirmation Letter ]	Version 1	13 October 2014
Other [PIS- Headteacher ]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [Honorary Contract/Proof of indemnity ]		
Other [Consent Form- Young Person Version 2]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [PIS- Director of Children's Services]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [Academic Supervisor CV]		15 August 2014
Other [Amendments to Research Letter ]	Version 1	13 October 2014
Other [Consent Form- Foster Carer Version 2]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [Research Protocol ]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [PIS- Foster Carer Version 2]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [PIS- Social Worker]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [PIS-Young Person Version 2]	Version 2	13 October 2014
Other [Consent Form- Parent ]	2	13 October 2014
Participant consent form [Director of Children Services]	2	10 October 2014
Participant information sheet (PIS) [Parent]	2	10 October 2014
REC Application Form [SC_Form_14082014]		14 August 2014
REC Application Form [SC_Form_13102014]		13 October 2014
Summary CV for Chief Investigator (CI) [CV]		

**Statement of compliance**

The Committee is constituted in accordance with the Governance Arrangements for Research Ethics Committees and complies fully with the Standard Operating Procedures for Research Ethics Committees in the UK.



14/IEC08/1013

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#### **After ethical review**

Now that you have completed the application process please visit the Social Care REC website – [www.screc.org.uk](http://www.screc.org.uk) and look at the 'After Ethical Review Section' for details of further requirements.

The attached document 'After Ethical Review – Guidance for Sponsors and Investigators' gives detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion, including:

- Notifying substantial amendments
- Adding new sites and investigators
- Progress and safety reports
- Notifying the end of the study

#### **Feedback to the Social Care REC**

The Committee would welcome your views on the service you have received from the Social Care REC and the application procedure. You can do this anonymously by completing our feedback form at: [www.screc.org.uk](http://www.screc.org.uk)

#### **HRA Training**

The HRA are pleased to welcome researchers and R&D staff at our training days – see details at <http://www.hra.nhs.uk/hra-training/>

**14/IEC08/1013**

**Please quote this number on all correspondence**

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.



14/IEC08/1013

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Yours sincerely



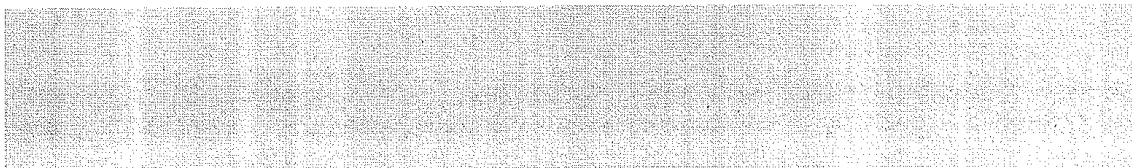
**Dr Martin Stevens**  
Chair

**Barbara Cuddon**  
Social Care Research Ethics Committee Co-ordinator  
Direct Line: 020 7535 0905  
[Barbara.Cuddon@scie.org.uk](mailto:Barbara.Cuddon@scie.org.uk)

Social Care REC Website: [www.screc.org.uk](http://www.screc.org.uk)

*Enclosure: List of names and professions of members who were present at the meeting and those who submitted written comments 'After Ethical Review – Guidance for Sponsors and Researchers'*

*Copy to: Dr Brian Davis, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA*



**Social Care REC**

**Attendance at Sub-Committee of the REC held in correspondence during the week commencing 20 October 2014**

**Committee Members:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Profession</i>
Dr Martin Stevens - Chair	Senior Research Fellow
Dr Michael Dunn	Lecturer in Health and Social Care Ethics
Dr Kathylene F Siska	Social Worker/Academic

**Also in attendance:**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position (or reason for attending)</i>
Mrs Barbara Cuddon	Social Care Rec Co-ordinator

## APPENDIX K: EXEMPLAR INFORMATION SHEETS FOR LAC AND PROFESSIONALS

### Young Person Information Sheet

I am completing research with looked after children which hopes to give you a chance to share your experiences of education and I would like to invite you to take part. Before you decide I would like you to fully understand what taking part would involve.

#### Study Title

What things support or get in the way of the progress of Looked After Children at Key Stage 4?

#### Purpose of the study

To hear your views about what supports your learning and what things you think may have been a barrier.

#### Do I have to take part?

No, taking part is completely your choice. If you agree to take part, then you will need to sign a consent form and we will set a date to meet. This will be organised with you through [Insert DT name].

#### What will the project involve?



The research will involve completing an interview with me to talk about your experiences of education. There are no right or wrong answers as I am interested in your views and experiences and you can share what information you are comfortable with.

The interview will take about 45 minutes and is at a time that suits you at your school. We can also discuss meeting at a different location if you prefer.

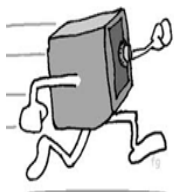
This also includes some time after the interview for you to talk about how you felt during the interview and for me to answer any questions you may have.

As a thank you for your participation in the study you will also receive a £10 Amazon gift voucher.

#### What will happen if I don't want to carry on?

Taking part in this project is your choice. At any time before or during the interview if you would like to stop completely or for a short break just let me know. You do not have to provide a reason. Choosing not to take part will not affect any support you receive.

If you no longer want your details to be included following the interview please speak to [Designated Teacher] by [end of term date]. After this date it may be more difficult to have all information removed.



#### Will my details be kept confidential?



What you share in the interview will be kept anonymous. Your name will be changed in the written report and information will not be linked to you in any way.

The only situation in which I would share anything specifically about you would be if you tell me something that means either yourself or someone else is in danger. In this case I have to pass the information on to another adult, but I will make sure that I let you know I am doing this and we will discuss how best to do this.



### What will happen to the results?

The interviews will be written up into a report that can be read by the public. The research will involve including anonymous quotes from the interviews and things you have told me may appear in the research. However, again all names will be changed and information will not be linked to you in any way.

I will send a summary of the results to the school so that you have an opportunity to see the outcomes of the research. Information from the research project will be kept up-to two years.

### Risks of research

If there are things you would like to receive further support for after the interview, we can talk through this together to think about how this can be fed back to a member of staff that you are comfortable with.

If you experience any difficult feelings following the interview this can be discussed with the DT who will speak with the researcher on your behalf. We will then, with your permission think about any possible support that you may want to receive.

### Who has checked this study?

This study has been checked by the Social Care Research Ethics Committee. A Research Ethics Committee is a group of people who make sure that a research project is safe to take part in.

### How to become involved

Once you have discussed the research with [Designated Teacher] you can let them know if you are interested in taking part. [Designated Teacher] will contact me and then I can arrange to meet with you to talk through the research and consent form further. Your guardian or a member of staff can be at this meeting too if you choose.

You will then have a further week to fully decide whether you want to take part. If you're happy to take part we will then arrange a date and time for you to complete the interview.

If you have any concerns about the researcher or this project, please talk to [Designated Teacher] or your carer who can support you with this.

Please keep this information sheet safe, just in case you want to read it again in the future. Your designated teacher also has a copy. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Kind Regards

Loxley Simmonds

## Information Sheet Professionals

Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

120 Belsize Lane

London

NW3 5BA

Tel: 0207 435 7111

[Insert Email Address]

Dear [Insert Name]

I am writing to introduce myself; I am Loxley Simmonds a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently working with X Local Authority. I am really interested in working with and supporting young people who are looked after. A part of the Doctorate in Child, Community & Educational Psychology that I am completing with the University of Essex/Tavistock and Portman Foundation Trust involves undertaking a key piece of research. I would therefore like to invite the young person you care for to take part in this research study.

Before you decide whether it is appropriate for them to participate I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for the young person. I am happy to go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have, so please give me a call or email me if there is anything that is not clear.

**Study Title:** What Factors Support or Hinder the Educational Progress of Looked After Children at KS4: A Grounded Theory Approach

### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of the study is to explore what factors support or hinder the educational progress of Looked After Children (LAC) at Key Stage 4. The research involves completing interviews with students between Years 10 and 12. This piece of research aims to provide valuable information for all agencies involved in supporting the education of looked-after children and young people to hopefully build on what helps and reduce what hinders these young people.

### **Why has your school been contacted?**

The researcher has been provided with permission to make contact with schools in the borough that currently have LAC attending their provision to potentially involve them in research, by the Director of Children's Social Care at X Local Authority.

The researcher has been provided with a list of schools that have LAC pupils attending their provision. The researcher has not been provided with any names or other identifiable

information. It is understood by the researcher that you may have a looked after child/children attending your school at Key Stage 4.

**Participation in the research:**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary for you and the young person. Choosing not to provide consent will not affect any support you or the young person may receive from the educational psychology service currently or in the future.

**What will the research involve for school staff?**

Should the young person agree to take part in the research the researcher would require you to provide your consent.

The study would require the Designated Teacher (DT) for LAC to facilitate communications between the researcher and the young person. It is expected that additional demands on the DT's time as a result of involvement in the research will be minimal.

**What will the research involve for the young person?**

The Designated Teacher for Looked-After children will discuss the research with the young person. If the young person decides to take part in the research a meeting can be organised to discuss the research with the young person in more detail. During this meeting the researcher will be able to answer any questions the young person may have.

At this meeting the young person will be accompanied by a member of school staff, which is likely to be the Designated Teacher for Looked-After Children but may be another member of staff if the young person chooses. The young person will then be given a further opportunity to go away and think about whether they definitely want to take part in the research. The young person's decision to/not to take part is then communicated to the researcher via the Designated Teacher for Looked-After Children.

If the young person still decides to take part in the research, the researcher will then organise to complete an individual interview with the young person in a confidential space at school, or another location should the young person wish i.e. at the local authority offices.

During the interview the young person will be asked to talk about their views and experiences of education, in particular what things have supported or hindered their progress at Key Stage 4. For example 'what things are going well in school? What do you think has helped?' However, this will be flexible depending on the young person's experiences in school that are most important to them.

Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes. This includes time at the end to discuss how the young person feels following the interview and to answer any questions they may have. Interviews will be audio-taped so that I have an accurate record of what was said.

As a thank you to the young person for their participation in the study they will receive a £10 Amazon Gift Voucher.

### **What will happen if the young person does not wish to carry on with the study?**

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. At any time before or during the interview if the young person would like to stop they can do so without question. After the interview if the young person no longer wants their interview to be included in the project they will be to inform the Designated Teacher. They will be asked to do this by [Insert Date]. After this date it may be more difficult to have all information removed however all unanalysed information will be removed.

### **Confidentiality:**

The young person will remain anonymous, all names and other potentially identifiable information will be changed in the written report and information will not be linked to the young person or school in any way. For example, the young person's name, the name of the school and members of staff will be removed so that it is not possible to identify them in any way. A relatively small number of students will be taking part in the research and these measures have been taken to protect the young person's anonymity. The researcher will have a master copy of participants and associated pseudonyms and this will be stored on a password protected computer at the local authority.

The handling and storing of personal information is in line with the Data Protection Act (1998). Information will be stored on a password protected computer or encrypted USB memory stick. Transcripts will be stored electronically as above. Transcripts will be stored for up-to two years following submission of my research thesis.

The only scenario where information will be shared is if the young person shares something that means either they or someone else is in danger. In this case I will pass the information on to the relevant adult and will act in accordance with the procedures outlined in the X EPS safeguarding protocol (available upon request). The young person will be informed in such a situation of this protocol.

### **Benefits/Risks associated with taking part in the research**

This research aims to provide the young person with an opportunity to voice their experiences of education. It is hoped that this information will further enable relevant services working with LAC to develop and implement appropriate support.

All potential risk factors need to be considered and mediated against, therefore as there may be psychological or emotional risks associated with the young person retelling their personal experiences of education which may have been difficult for them; As a precaution, participants will be provided with the opportunity to discuss any concerns that arise from taking part in the research following the interview during the debriefing. They will additionally be made aware that the Designated Teacher (or other school professional if preferred) are available to discuss any matters that arise.

As an additional safeguard, they will be made aware that they can contact the researcher or other support via their Designated Teacher, who will liaise with the researcher to discuss the issues and appropriate next steps i.e. sign posting to relevant services within the EPS or involvement of another service if the young person requires the emotional support.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

This research is part of my doctoral qualification and the information gathered in the interviews will be written up as a thesis that will be publicly accessible. Part of the research process will involve including anonymised quotes or extracts from the interviews in published reports or presentations of the analysis. Consent will be sought from the young person prior to this.

After I have completed the research, I will send a summary of the research findings to yourself and the young person. The research will also be presented to relevant teams within the Local Authority and may be published.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is being conducted on behalf of X Service. It is funded and organised by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the Social Care Research Ethics Committee. A Research Ethics Committee is a group of independent people who review research to protect the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of participants and researchers.

**Further information and contact details**

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the researcher or any other aspects of this research project, please contact X, the Trust Quality assurance Officer X. And please feel free to contact me to discuss any concerns or to seek any clarification.

I have enclosed an information sheet and consent form for the young person so that the DT can discuss the research with the young person. I have also enclosed additional information sheets and consent forms which can be passed onto the young person's foster carer/biological parents (if necessary) and their social worker.

Kind Regards

Loxley Simmonds

## APPENDIX L: EXEMPLAR CONSENT FORMS FOR LAC AND PROFESSIONALS

## Young Person Consent Form

Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
 120 Belsize Lane  
 London  
 NW3 5BA  
 Tel: 0207 435 7111  
[lsimmonds@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:lsimmonds@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

**Research Title:** What Do You Find Helps or Acts a Barrier to Your Educational Progress at Key Stage 4?

Dear Young Person,

Please read the Information Sheet before filling in this form. Please read the statements below and circle your response. At the end of the form please sign your name if you would like to take part in this research.

You will have a chance to talk this form through with the researcher before completing an interview.

I confirm that:



I have read the information sheet about this project and have had time to think about the information and ask [Designated Teacher's name] and the researcher any questions about the research.

Yes/No



I understand that taking part in this research is voluntary and I can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. I understand that the interviews will take place at a location which is comfortable for me. This may be at school or another preferred location.

Yes/No



I understand that I can have my information removed from the research if I change my mind after the interview. I can do this by speaking to [DT Teacher for LAC] by [insert end of term date].

Yes/No



I understand that my name will be changed and other names such as my teachers and the name of my school.

Yes/No

I understand that information from my interview will not be linked to me in any way.

I understand that if something I share means that I or someone else are at risk of harm the researcher will share this information with another adult and will let me know if he has to do this.

Yes/No

I understand that I will have an opportunity to think about any difficulties i.e. about school that arise from the interview, with the researcher/DT.

Yes/No

I understand that the interview will be recorded so that there is a good record of what was said and I understand that this will be typed up.

Yes/No



I give consent for things I talk about in the interview to be included in the research write up as anonymous quotes, and that these quotes could be seen by members of the public.

Name.....

Date.....

(Please print your full name)

Signature.....(Please sign your name)

## Consent Form Professionals/Adult

Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
120 Belsize Lane  
London  
NW3 5BA  
Tel: 0207 435 7111  
[lsimmonds@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:lsimmonds@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Name of Participant:

Date of Birth:

Please ensure that you have read the Information Sheet. Please then read the following statements carefully and add your signature if you give your consent. If you have any questions, please contact Loxley Simmonds on 0207 435 7111 or via email at [lsimmonds@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:lsimmonds@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

**Research Title:** What Factors Support or Hinder the Educational Progress of Looked After Children at KS4: A Grounded Theory Approach

This is a voluntary piece of research and deciding not to provide consent will not affect any support you receive from the educational psychology service.

By signing the form you are agreeing to the following:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about it.
- I understand that the young person will complete an individual interview lasting approximately 45 minutes to talk about their educational experiences of Key Stage 4.
- I understand this research is entirely voluntary and that the young person can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that following the interview, should the young person wish to withdraw they can do so by [end of term date] and the young person will do this via the Designated Teacher for Looked-After Children who will contact the researcher.
- I understand that requests to remove information after [end of term date] may not be possible.
- I understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with a summary of the research findings.
- I understand that the information provided by the young person will be anonymised such that only the researcher can trace this information back to the young person.



WHAT FACTORS SUPPORT OR HINDER...

- I understand that the transcripts from this research will be retained for up to 2 years before it is deleted.
- I understand that upon completion of the study, information gathered in the interviews will be written up as a Doctoral thesis that will be publicly accessible.
- I understand that the young person will remain anonymous, unless the young person shares something that means either they or someone else is in danger. In this case the researcher will pass the information on to the relevant adult and follow the safeguarding procedures outlined by X EPS and the researcher will inform the young person of these actions.
- I understand that the researcher has also been given consent to approach the young person by the school and Director of Children's Social Care at X Local Authority.
- I understand that contact will only be made with the young person once consent has been received from you.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Print Name) provide consent for [Child's Name] to take part in this research, conducted by Loxley Simmonds (Trainee Educational Psychologist).

Signed:

Date:

Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records before returning this form to Loxley Simmonds at [Insert Local Authority address].