

***You can't always be at school, you need to move on: A multi-perspective study exploring the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents during post-school transition***

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## **Abstract**

The experience of post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties can be a challenging time as it marks a significant change in their lives. Although government policy has recommended that schools involve both young people and their parents in all aspects of post-school transition processes, research has frequently found low levels of involvement by parties during post-school transition planning (e.g. collaboration and decision-making).

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties and their parents as they transition from a special school sixth-form unit to a post-school provision (mainstream Further Education college). An idiographical investigation of the experiences of young people and their parents of post-school transition was conducted. Through applying a multi-perspective approach and an exploratory qualitative research design, data in the form of twelve transcripts, derived from sound recording was obtained using semi structured interviews with six participants (three young people with moderate learning difficulties and one of each of their parents) before the young people moved to college and after their move.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to analyse the young people's and parents' accounts of their transition and the following three key themes were found to be applicable across all cases: (i) Adjusting to Change; (ii) Involvement and Support; and (iii) Moving Towards Adulthood. These themes are similar to previous research, which has explored experiences of post-school transition for youngsters and parents.

These research findings raised some important implications for Educational Psychologists with regards to support for both young people with learning difficulties and their parents and carers

during transition, including support and training for key adults in order to enable them to think about the emotional impact of transition and individual therapeutic support for young people during this significant period in their lives.

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# **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

## **1.1 Overview**

This thesis will present research, which explores the post-school transition experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents. With this in mind this chapter will provide definitions of the terms ‘learning difficulty’ and ‘moderate learning difficulty’ followed by an introduction to the concept of ‘transition’ and how it relates to this research. This chapter will also provide contextual information about post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties and their parents in relation to the national context and government policy. Finally, the rationale and aims underpinning this research will be presented.

## **1.2 Defining the term ‘Learning Difficulty’**

A child or young person identified as having learning difficulties reportedly has:

A significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of the children of his age or has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of his age in schools within the area of the local education authority (Frederickson & Cline, 2009, p.307).

The definition above presents an inclusive view, which incorporates a range of Special Educational Need (SEN) and illustrates more general learning difficulties, which are viewed as “general problems” (Frederickson and Cline, 2009, p.307), that have an impact on all aspects of learning and in some cases development. According to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015), within the area of cognition and learning needs, “Learning difficulties cover a wide range of needs” (p.97), which include moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). This research will be exploring the experiences of young people

with MLD, which has been described as “attainments well below expected levels in all or most areas of the curriculum, despite appropriate interventions” (Department for Education and Skills, 2005, p.6). The DfES (2005) also suggested that children and young people with MLD have:

Much greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and in understanding concepts. They may also have associated speech and language delay, low self-esteem, low levels of concentration and under-developed social skills (p.6).

The terms learning disability and mild learning disabilities have also been used when referring to individuals with the aforementioned needs however advocacy groups such as ‘People First’ suggest that the use of the term ‘learning difficulty’ is preferred over labels such as ‘learning disability’ as it conveys the idea that “learning support needs change over time” (Hardie & Tilly, 2012, p.4), as opposed to seeing difficulties in learning as disabling. With this in mind, use of the term learning difficulty will be adopted throughout this thesis when referring to the young people’s learning needs.

### **1.3 Youth Transitions**

An important change within an individual’s life-course is the transition from ‘childhood’ to ‘adulthood’, which occurs through a number of “different dimensions of experience” such as “biological, legal, social, cultural, emotional and attitudinal” (Jones & Wallace, 1992 as cited in Mitchell, 1999, p.753). One of the many definitions of transition has proposed that it is “the move from school or college to training/ employment; financial independence; leaving the family home; and beginning sexual relationships, coupledness and parenthood” (Barnardo’s, 1996 as cited in Abbott and Carpenter, 2014, p.1193).

In England, it is a statutory requirement that young people attend school up until the age of 16 (Department for Education and Employment, 1997 as cited in Dewson, Aston, Bates, Ritchie &

Dyson, 2004). However, as the participation age has been raised to 18 years old (DfE, 2014), a decision must be made about what the young person will pursue next and a transition from statutory schooling to further education, vocational training or employment is usually made (Dewson et al., 2004). There is also a fourth pathway labeled ‘not in education, employment, or training’ which is often referred to as ‘NEET’ and may occur when young people leave school because they do not want to stay in education, find it difficult or may be unwilling to take up employment. Other young people may engage in other activities such as taking up carer roles or in more negative cases engaging in illegal activity (Dewson et al., 2004).

A useful definition for the transition associated with education and moving from school to post-school activity has been provided by Children with Disability Australia (2015), who suggest that it is:

A time period and/ or process where a young person is able to access information and make choices about their future after leaving school. It is a milestone, which often intersects with other monumental life changes such as an increase in independence (p.7).

This definition highlights two key points which this research is interested in: firstly a young person’s ability to access information necessary to support their post-school choices and arrangements; and secondly, the emergence of increased independence for young people during this time. This definition also highlights the multifaceted nature of transition and the need for transition planning for young people.

Polat, Kalambouka, Boyle & Nelson (2001) reported that for young people with SEN the transition from childhood to adulthood can be more challenging than for young people without SEN due to the “change of a whole range of provision and related educational, health and social services” (p.20). Dewson et al. (2004) also noted that young people with learning difficulties

may experience challenges with gaining access to “mainstream forms of provision and their actual choices at age 16 may be severely constrained” (p.12), which makes attempts to work towards further education, training or employment problematic.

Lack of planning related to transition from school to adult life for young people with learning difficulties can also result in “fewer opportunities to be included in their community” (Florian, Dee, Byers & Maudslay, 2000, p.128).

#### **1.4 Transition Planning**

According to Byers, Dee, Hayhoe & Maudsley (2002) the goal of transition planning is to facilitate and prepare young people for their transition from school to adult life by planning goals and objectives in “life areas within which the student will be expected to function after leaving school ... in order to contribute to reducing inactivity and promote quality of life” (as cited in Goupil, Tassé, Garcin & Doré, 2002, p.127). Such areas include employment, extended schooling, home living, accessing community services, and leisure activities (Goupil et al., 2002).

According to Abbott & Carpenter (2014, p.1194) transition planning should be “participative, holistic, supportive, evolving, inclusive and collaborative” and “must be designed for and with each young person” as they move towards adult life (DfE, 2015). Transition Plans should be prepared for all young people who have a statement of SEN (DfEE, 1994 as cited in Polat et al., 2001), or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday at an annual review meeting and should be reviewed at all following annual reviews. The plan must focus on the young person’s needs, abilities, post-16 aspirations and how they will be supported to achieve them (DfE, 2015).

Carpenter (1996) suggested that one of the roles of transition planning is to empower young people with learning difficulties however in order for it to be successful a number of elements must be present. For example, the young person who is at the centre of the process should be encouraged to actively participate in the planning process and make decisions related to their future (DfE, 2015); have aspirations, which are shared and acknowledged; and be supported with accessing information and advice regarding post-school arrangements (Polat et al., 2001). Parents and carers' should also have the opportunity to contribute to the process and have their views and expectations acknowledged (Danek and Busby, 1999); and it is important that the school and other relevant professionals involved share detailed assessment and intervention information, which will support the young person as they move on to a new setting (Polat et al., 2001).

Effective post-school transition planning offers the opportunity for “coordinated planning, collaboration and decision-making among school staff, families and a network of community agencies” (Flexer, Simmons, Luft & Baer, 2005 as cited in Davies & Beamish, 2009, p.48), which is a legal requirement of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and focuses on ensuring the young person's needs are taken into account so that they can achieve positive post-16 outcomes (Polat et al., 2001).

In the United Kingdom (UK) young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in post-school education are commonly identified as having Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD), (Hubble, 2012). According to the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), the term disability is defined as “having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities” (para.1). Research has frequently demonstrated that during post-school transition, young people with

LDD “routinely miss out on the support and planning that is required by law” (Abbott & Carpenter, 2014, p.1194). Hart, White & Sharp (2011) also suggested that transition planning offered to young people with LDD is inadequate and authors such as Heslop, Mallet, Simmons & Ward, (2002) found that one-fifth of the young people they interviewed left school without a transition plan. Such practice is in direct opposition to OFSTED’s (2010) suggestion that young people with LDD, more than other groups require information, support and advice in order for them to pursue further education or employment.

### **1.5 Government Policy and Post-school Transition**

The challenges surrounding post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties have been identified as a priority for both national and local government and have been addressed in legislation and guidance (Kaehne & Beyer, 2011). For example over the past 15 years government policy and strategy documents in the UK have focused on transition for young people with learning difficulties from school to post school provision (DfES, 2001; Department of Health, 2001; Grant & Ramcharan, 2007; Kaehne & Beyer, 2009). At a national level, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) highlighted that young people should have their views and wishes taken into account in all decision-making processes that have an impact on their lives. Such views appear to be influenced by the legally binding agreement proposed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989), which states that the views of children and young people must be taken into account by those involved in planning for their future.

In 2001, the UK government published a White Paper entitled ‘Valuing People Now: A New Three-Year Strategy for People with Learning Disabilities’, which revealed that young people had “little involvement in decision making” (DoH, 2001, p.44) although they are capable of

making choices and expressing their preferences. The White Paper also highlighted that parents offer a “vital contribution” (DoH, 2001, p.53) to the lives of their sons and daughters with learning difficulties and should be involved in the transition planning process. However, despite such compulsory practice being specified, it has been recognised that “the voices of young people from marginalised groups within society have tended to be ignored and patronised in .... decision-making processes” (Rose & Shevlin, 2004, p.156).

The Green Paper ‘Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability’ (DfE, 2011) acknowledged that the support needed to ensure that young people with SEN experienced a positive transition to adulthood was insufficient because professionals working with this group of young people were “not encouraged to focus on the young person's ambitions” and did not place much attention on supporting them with preparing for adult life, which often resulted in “poor planning” of education, health and social care support (DfE, 2011, p.10). The Green Paper did however acknowledge that some LEAs had successfully implemented “effective arrangements for supporting transition, with well coordinated planning and advice”, which had a positive impact and “difference to young people’s futures” (DfE, 2011, p.82). In order to build on such good practice and “improve outcomes ... for transition to adult life” (DfE, 2011, p.82), the Green Paper’s follow-up document ‘Support and Aspiration: Progress and next steps’ (DfE, 2012), proposed that by 2015 young people with SEN would have access to improved “vocational and work-related learning options”; and “well-coordinated transition from children’s to adult health services” in order to support post-16 transition (DfE, 2012, p.50).

More recently, the Children and Families Act (2014), which aims to improve services for vulnerable individuals has also emphasised the need to move towards a more person-centred approach to transition planning by ensuring that children, young people and their parents or

carers are involved in decision-making and have greater control related to their future. The new SEN Code of Practice (2015) has also devoted an entire chapter to discussing guidance related to ensuring that young people and their parents are placed at the centre of all important decision-making processes (DfE, 2015).

Despite legislative guidance that suggests it is good practice to include young people with SEN in transition planning and decision-making processes, the Department for Education (Simes, 2014) published figures, which revealed that out of the 1,492,950 pupils in the United Kingdom with registered SEN in January 2014, 85.8% aged 16/17 year olds with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) were identified as being in education and training, which was found to be 4.7 percentage points lower than young people without LDD (90.5%) (Simes, 2014). Such data serves as evidence, which continues to illustrate that young people with LDD and especially MLD, continue to exhibit lower rates of continued education and poor outcomes as Stowell (1987) suggested almost 29 years ago (as cited in Armstrong & Davies, 1995). Such differences between young people with and without LDD at this stage of post-school transition also continues to suggest that “the choices and opportunities available” to them at this time in their lives “differ considerably” and transition is therefore “likely to be experienced differently” (Corbett & Barton, 1992 as cited in Armstrong & Davies, 1995, p.70).

### **1.6 Experiences of Post-school transition for Young People with Learning Difficulties and their Parents and Carers**

Like government policy and guidance, authors have also highlighted the importance of involving young people in making decisions related to their future. For example, Kohler (1993) found that “direct participation” of young people with learning difficulties in their transition planning has been successful and “among one of the best practice approaches to use” (as cited in Goupil et al.,



2002, p.128). Similarly, Gersch (1996) proposed that children and young people ought to have their views taken into account because they have a valuable contribution to make towards decision-making processes related to their own lives, which adults can learn from (as cited in Hayes, 2004). However, it has consistently been found that young people with learning difficulties continue to remain “on the periphery of decision-making processes in education” despite the fact that the outcomes of such practices “will have a profound impact on their current and their future lives” (Rose & Shevlin, 2004, p.156).

Research has also revealed “low levels of family participation” (Davies & Beamish, 2009, p.249) during post-school transition planning processes for young people with learning difficulties. Although young people aged 16-25 years old are legally considered capable of making decisions related to their lives and their post-school education, research has found that parents and carers are viewed as an “essential component of the transition process” and as “prime advocates for young adults experiencing transition to post-school life” (Davies & Beamish, 2009, p.248).

Steering groups such as parent carer involvement groups for families with disabled children also emphasise the importance of parental involvement in decision-making and acknowledged the value of parents and carers’ knowledge, contribution and the essential role they play in the lives of their children on local, regional and national levels (National Network of Parent Carer Forums, 2013). However research has found that although parents and carers are theoretically viewed as valuable individuals who provide information during post-school transition, they are rarely included in the process (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010). Other findings have also revealed that although some parents feel they are part of the transition process, they continue to be dissatisfied with the lack of communication related to the information shared during the process (Ward, Mallett, Heslop & Simons, 2003).

## **1.7 Research Aims and Questions**

Post-school transition for young people has been a “major source of academic and empirical interest” (Abbott & Carpenter, 2014, p.2), and has also been a topic of discussion in relation to improving the process and outcomes for young people with learning difficulties within government and national policy for a number of years. Despite this however, young people continue to have “little if any involvement” (Ward et al., 2003, p.134), in a process that should be adopting a person-centred approach (Beresford, 2004).

With this in mind, the aim of this research is to extend the current knowledge base by exploring the experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties as they transition from school to post-school provision and to explore the parent/ carers’ experiences of their youngsters’ post-school transition experiences. These aims will be explored through the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties as they transition from a special educational needs school to post-school educational provision?
- What are parents/carers’ experiences and understanding of their son or daughter’s experience of transition to post-school educational provision from a special school for children and young people with learning difficulties?

These questions will be addressed because for many years it has been found that the ‘voices’ of parents and carers and more specifically young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are “rarely presented in the literature on disability and education” (Wilson, 2004, p.163), and in order to develop a real sense of their experiences of post-school transition processes their views

and experiences need to be acknowledged and included. This research will focus on young people with MLD because although such young people may require support with learning and day to day care, they are more likely to have the ability to communicate their needs, views and wishes and should therefore be able to meaningfully engage in their post-school educational transition planning. Research has also found that this group of young people are more likely to be NEET and so exploring what supports them during this time is necessary in order to avoid such outcomes.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview:**

This chapter will provide a systematic and critical review of the research literature regarding the experiences of post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties and their parents. A review of the research and issues associated with post-school transition will also be provided and the chapter will conclude with literature on the emotional impact of transition on young people with learning difficulties and their parents and carers.

### **2.2 Systematic Literature Search**

Transition from school to post-school provision is a key life event for young people as it signals the move from childhood to young adulthood. It is also a time that is accompanied by new opportunities such as increased independence (Griffiths, 1994). For young people with learning difficulties (e.g. moderate, severe and profound) the move from full-time education to post-school provision (college or employment) can be a very challenging time as it is accompanied by a number of changes including moving away from a familiar setting, adults, peers and routines (McGinty & Fish, 1992). For the parents of young people with learning difficulties, post-school transition can also be a time of uncertainty and accompanied by challenges, as they have to support their youngster with making important decisions regarding their future during this life-changing period (McGinty & Fish, 1992).

The primary focus of this systematic literature review is to “comprehensively ... collect, appraise, and synthesize ... available empirical evidence” (Yannascoli, Schenker, Carey, Ahn & Baldwin, 2013, p.64) concerning the experiences of young people with cognition and learning difficulties and their parents and carers as they transition from school to post-school provision.

This review will attempt to identify the key themes related to this area of study.

The specific research questions for the systematic literature review are as follows:

- *What does existing literature tell us about the experiences of post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties?*
- *What does existing literature tell us about the experiences of post-school transition for the parents of young people with learning difficulties?*

The above research questions aim to develop an understanding of research already conducted which has explored experiences of transition for groups of young people with learning difficulties related to cognition and learning needs (including moderate, severe and profound difficulties) and their parents and carers. The questions also aim to identify any gaps in literature that could be further explored.

### **2.3 Systematic Literature Search Strategy**

In order to identify relevant research related to this subject area the electronic databases PsychINFO, Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), and EBSCO Discovery (CINAHL and SocINDEX) were searched for articles as they were thought to provide a range of subject areas and disciplines that would produce relevant research related to post-school transition experiences.

Initial searches using the terms: special educational needs, learning difficulties, transition planning, post-school, parents and young people produced a high number of results. In order to conduct a more focused search, which produced more relevant results related to this study's research questions the search terms used were reviewed and adapted during preliminary searches

in order to ensure that the most useful terms were included which would provide relevant research.

A Venn diagram was created in order to assist the researcher in being able to break down the research questions so that the relevant terms could be identified and included in searches (Appendix 1). The final search terms that were entered into the databases were:

*( transition OR transition planning ) AND ( post-school OR post-16 ) AND ( parents OR mother OR father OR carer ) AND ( learning difficulties OR learning disability OR special educational needs ) AND ( experience OR involvement OR decisions )*

and

*( transition OR transition planning ) AND ( post-school OR post-16 ) AND ( young people OR young person OR pupil OR student ) AND ( learning difficulties OR learning disability OR special educational needs ) AND ( experience OR involvement OR decisions )*.

When searching for articles, a range of 'limiters' were used in order to reflect the inclusion criteria and to narrow the results produced so that they were relevant. For example, search options included: English language; Peer Reviewed; and Research carried out in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Search expanders used included: Apply related words; Also search within the full text of the articles; and Search related subjects, as opposed to searching for the key terms in the titles of the articles. The reason for using this approach stemmed from the researcher's previous experiences of searching for research, which found that a number of articles published in this area had

'catchphrase' type titles which do not always appear to represent what the actual content or research is about. As a result it was felt that searching for the terms within the text would be a better approach than solely searching titles in order to ensure that articles were not missed. The searches for articles were conducted on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015. The date range of the articles being searched for was January 2000 – November 2015. This specific time period was chosen due to policy changes (Department of Health, 2001; Department for Education and Skills, 2001; Department for Education, 2015; and the Children and Families Act, 2014) that had been implemented during this period and may have influenced practices related to post-school transition experiences for young people and their families.

#### **2.4 Study Selection Criteria**

In order to select research articles for the current review an inclusion and exclusion criteria was set (Appendix 2) before all searches had taken place. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to all of the studies included in this review.

In order to include and exclude articles found, the approach of Yannascoli, Schenker & Carey, et al. (2013) to reviewing literature as part of systematic literature reviews was used as it suggests that first, second and third-pass reviews should be a part of the review process. During the first-pass review the title of all articles found were reviewed and all "clearly irrelevant studies" were excluded on the basis that they were in no way related to answering the reviews questions (Yannascoli, Schenker & Carey, et al., 2013, p.66). Following this stage the second-pass review was carried out where the abstracts of the remaining articles were reviewed further and any irrelevant studies were excluded at this stage (Appendix 3). After this stage all remaining articles underwent a full-text review in order to further investigate whether they met the inclusion criteria. The articles that did not were excluded at the third-pass review (Appendix 4).

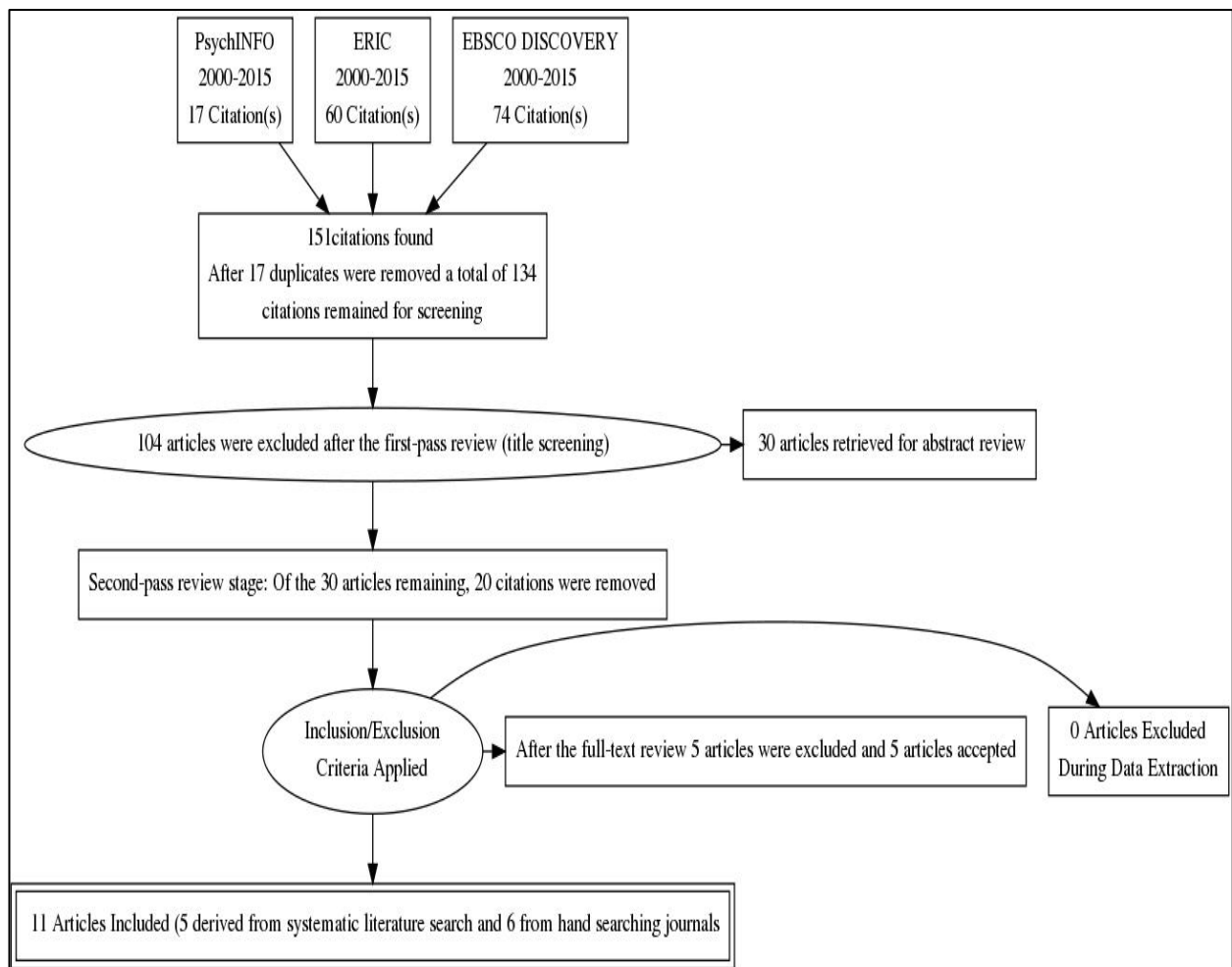


Figure 2.1 Article selection process

Figure 2.1 provides an illustration of how the articles included in the systematic literature review were identified. Both sets of search terms were combined using “search with AND” in order to identify any duplicate research. The final number of articles using EBSCO Discovery on 10.11.15 (CINAHL with Full Text: 66 and SocINDEX with Full Text: 8) was 74 when searching for articles related to young people and parents/ carers. Searches using PsycINFO on 10.11.15 produced 17 citations (14 results for ‘young people’ searches and three results for parent/ carer searches). Searches using ERIC on 10.11.15 found 60 citations (35 results for young people and 25 for the parent/ carer searches) after filters were applied. All of the results were then imported



to Endnote and duplicate entries were identified using the 'Find Duplicates' function. Of the 151 articles found 17 duplicates were removed, which left 134 articles to explore during the first-pass review. Reasons for excluding citations found at this stage included a number of the results being editorials and because they were conducted in countries outside of the stated parameters, namely the United Kingdom and Ireland.

In addition to the electronic searches, hand searching was used to identify relevant research citations by looking at reference lists in research papers and well known articles in this specific area of research. In doing so a further six articles were found to be relevant resulting in a total of 11 articles being the focus of this review (Appendix 5).

## **2.5 Study Quality Assessment**

In order to assess the quality of the 11 studies an evaluative framework called the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP): Qualitative Research (2014) was used. The rationale behind using the CASP was because it guided the review of the selected studies through its listing of 10 screening questions which were used to assess each of the studies included. The rationale for using the CASP also relates to its pilot use on a number of occasions during the researcher's research seminars where she had the opportunity to use it when appraising a range of different qualitative research papers. Following such experiences it was felt that the CASP would be a reliable tool to use when examining the studies. At this stage the CASP was not used to exclude articles (Appendix 5).

## **2.6 Data Extraction and Synthesis**

In order to extract data from the 11 included articles found during the literature searches, a data extraction form was used to explore different aspects of the research found. Information related

to each of the study's designs, participants, measures used, data analysis and findings/outcomes were recorded (Appendix 5).

Following this a qualitative synthesis of the results was conducted. Research synthesis refers to the "bringing together of a body of research on a particular topic" (Ring, Ritchie, Mandava & Jepson, 2011, p.3). According to Ring et al. (2011) synthesis of qualitative research, aims to explore or to add to the understanding of a particular phenomenon or individuals' experiences. The rationale behind carrying out a qualitative data synthesis stems from the view that qualitative studies play an important role in understanding how factors may possibly support or hinder post-school transition experiences for young people with learning difficulties and their parents/carers. In addition, qualitative research synthesis can also contribute to: gaining new insight into relevant individuals' perspectives of an experience; and assessing whether there are gaps in research, and therefore a need for more primary research to be carried out (Ring et al., 2011).

## **2.7 Review of the Included Studies**

As the primary focus of the literature search was to find research which explored experiences of post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties and their parents and carers, a number of the studies found adopted a multi-perspective approach as they included the views of young people, their parents and carers and professionals involved in the transition process. However, reference has only been made to the views and perspectives of young people and parents and carers as that is the focus of this review. The views of professionals are beyond the scope of this literature review and have been omitted from the discussion.

This review will provide a summary of the aims of the research papers and a critique of the research designs employed to investigate them. Particular attention will also be placed on the key findings of the studies included with regards to the transition experiences and the views of young people and parents and carers. The associated strengths and limitations linked to the studies' design and the degree to which it is felt that the findings from the studies are considered to be both reliable and valid will also be addressed. This review will conclude by discussing the ways in which the current research will attempt to address the identified 'gaps' in the literature.

### **2.7.1 Research Aims of the Selected Studies**

The aims of the included studies consisted of exploring: the experiences of young people as they transition from childhood to adulthood (MacIntyre, 2014); the information that young people with learning disabilities and their families need during their transition (Tarleton & Ward, 2005); decision-making processes among young people with special educational needs and their families (Dee, 2002); the challenges faced by young people with learning difficulties in out-of-area schools and colleges at transition (Heslop & Abbott, 2008); post-school aspirations (such as provision) and the views of young people with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) in contrast to their parents views (Smyth & McConkey, 2003).

The research which largely looked at parental views aimed to explore: parents' experiences and perceptions of the factors that support or act as barriers during their son or daughters' transition (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010); parents' experiences of decision-making during their child's transition from full-time education (Maddison & Beresford, 2012); families' perceptions of what contributes to a satisfactory pathway and outcome at transition for their son or daughter with intellectual disabilities who attend an out-of-area residential school/college (Heslop & Abbott, 2007); Legislation and guidance of transition and its impact on parents and young people with

learning disabilities experiences of transition (Ward, Mallett, Heslop & Simons, 2003); what happens when the views of young adults and their parents conflict during the transition from child to adulthood (Pilnick, Clegg, Murphy & Almack, 2011); and how those involved in young people's transition negotiate dilemmas related to the rights of the young person and the difficulties they experience in their general learning ability (Murphy, Clegg & Almack, 2011).

### **2.7.2 Sampling and Participants**

All of the studies included used purposive sampling to recruit participants, which is said to be “synonymous with qualitative research” (Palys, 2008, p.697). The use of purposive sampling ensured that the individuals recruited would be the right fit for the research questions being explored. Only two of the studies explicitly mentioned employing the use of pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Maddison & Beresford, 2012 and Gillan & Coughlan, 2010), which were used to help choose appropriate participants.

The participants in all of the studies predominantly consisted of young people with differing degrees of learning difficulty (e.g. mild, moderate, severe, profound and complex), and/or the parents of young people with learning difficulties. For example, parents of young people with mild learning difficulties (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010); young people with severe learning difficulties (Smyth & McConkey, 2003); and parents of youngsters with degenerative conditions and learning difficulties (although six out of the 18 young people did not have a learning difficulty) (Maddison & Beresford, 2012). There were also some young people included in Dee's (2002) research who did not have cognition and learning difficulties as their stated special educational need but who experienced other difficulties such as emotional and behavioural difficulties (one young person), two young people who were profoundly deaf; one with physical disability; and one young person who was blind.

Four studies consisted of only parents' views and experiences of post-school transition (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Heslop & Abbott, 2008; Heslop & Abbott, 2007; and Maddison & Beresford, 2012), whilst seven studies (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Ward *et al*, 2003; MacIntyre, 2014; Smyth & McConkey, 2003; Dee, 2002; Murphy *et al.*, 2010; and Pilnick *et al.*, 2011) claimed to generate data from young people and their parents and carers, but largely focused on and reported the parents' views, which has been identified as a limitation as it does not offer full transparency.

In relation to sample sizes, three of the studies (Dee, 2002; Pilnick *et al.*, 2001; and Heslop & Abbott, 2008) did not provide information about the number of parents included in the research. Seven of the studies consisted of sample sizes between 8-35 participants (Heslop & Abbott, 2008; Ward *et al.*, 2003; Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Maddison & Beresford, 2012; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Pilnick *et al.*, 2011; and Dee, 2002). Four studies however, consisted of larger sample sizes of between 56-90 participants (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; MacIntyre, 2014, Smyth & McConkey, 2003; and Murphy *et al.*, 2010). It could be argued that larger sample numbers in research is favourable because the results can be generalized to other populations with similar characteristics (Coolican, 2004). However, it is widely accepted that smaller sample sizes can produce an in-depth and richer picture of the participants' views and experiences (Mertens, 2005), which is also valuable.

### **2.7.3 Study Design**

All of the studies used a qualitative research design, which was deemed appropriate because it emphasises the importance of meanings and experiences for individuals (Coolican, 2004), and provides participants (including those with disabilities) with the opportunity to express their views about their experience of post-school transition (Beresford, 1997).

One of the studies however, employed a mixed-methods approach, which included the use of questionnaires as a data collection method (Ward et al., 2003). By using this approach, it afforded the authors with the opportunity to triangulate the data, which can be viewed as beneficial (Creswell, 2009).

Five studies employed a longitudinal approach as the participants were interviewed on a number of different occasions over a given time period. The purpose of using this approach allowed authors to explore the post-school transition experiences of the young people and their parents over time and to identify if any changes occurred that impacted their experiences (Farrall, 2006). For example, the interviews with the young people and their parents conducted by Murphy et al. (2010) took place on three different occasions over the period of six months; Maddison & Beresford (2012) interviewed participants up to three times over the period of thirty months; and Dee (2002) interviewed young people and their parents annually over the period of three years. Two studies (Heslop & Abbott, 2008 and MacIntyre, 2014), which also used a longitudinal approach, did not state the time period regarding when their interviews took place.

The remaining six studies however, did not adopt this approach, with four studies opting for single interviews on one occasion with the young people and parents (Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Smyth & McConkey, 2003; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; and Ward et al., 2003) and two studies using alternative qualitative designs such as group discussions (Tarleton & Ward, 2005 and Pilnick et al., 2011).

#### **2.7.4 Data Collection Methods**

Interviews are a commonly used data collection method in qualitative research designs and identified strengths of this method include its flexibility and the opportunity they provide for the

interviewee to talk about a personal experience in their life. Nine of the studies used individual interviews (semi-structured or in-depth) as the main method of data collection (Heslop & Abbott, 2008; Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Smyth & McConkey, 2003; Maddison & Beresford, 2012; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Ward et al., 2003; Dee, 2002; MacIntyre, 2014; Murphy et al, 2011). This approach was felt to be an appropriate method of data collection used by the studies (Willig, 2013).

The remaining two studies used other qualitative methods such as focus groups (Tareleton & Ward, 2005), which was useful as it encouraged group interaction and discussions regarding a collectively experienced topic (in this case post-school transition). This approach also provided an opportunity to use larger sample sizes as part of qualitative research (Freitas, Oliveira, Jenkins & Popjoy, 1998). However the disadvantages associated with using focus groups is that the atmosphere in which they take place is not natural and may therefore have impacted on the group members' behaviour and the data collected (Freitas et al., 1998).

Pilnick et al. (2011) on the other hand used audio-recorded data collected during transition review and leaver's review meetings, which consisted of young people, parents and carers and other professionals. An analysis of the discussions that took place was then carried out. This was a useful approach as it allowed the researchers to use data that had been generated in a naturalistic setting.

### **2.7.5 Data Analysis**

The method of data analysis used by the researchers was identified in a majority of studies in this review (Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Maddison & Beresford, 2012; Gillan & Coughlan 2011; Pilnick et al., 2011; Tarleton & Ward, 2005; MacIntyre, 2005; and Murphy et al., 2010). For example,

Maddison & Beresford, (2012) provided a brief description of their framework approach (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). MacIntyre, (2005) explained that her data was analysed “on a case-by-case basis in order that each individual perspective was recognised” and that “key themes across cases were also identified” (p.864) however not much description regarding the actual analysis type and theoretical influence was provided. Murphy et al. (2010, p.64) used a 76 item coding framework which was “developed, incorporating themes identified from the data and issues which informed the research from the outset”, however no explanation was provided regarding how the data collected was applied to it.

In Gillan & Coughlan’s (2011) study the authors provided a detailed account of their approach to their data analysis, explaining that Corbin & Strauss’s (1988) Grounded Theory approach was used as their method of data analysis. This demonstrated analytic transparency as readers were able to infer specifics about the approach used to analyse the data (Moravcsik, 2014). Pilnick et al. (2011) used Conversation Analysis and also provided a detailed account about the approach employed, making it possible for others to identify and if necessary replicate the data analysis, which supports the reliability of the research.

Heslop & Abbott (2007) provided a brief description of the method of data analysis employed, with descriptions such as “Two researchers independently read all the texts and selected text segments into main and subthemes” (Heslop & Abbott, 2007, p.491). Although this demonstrates some transparency, which is positive, no direct or specific reference was made regarding the approach used therefore reducing others’ ability to reliably learn about and repeat the method of analysis used with similar participants in the future (Brink, 1993).



Tarleton & Ward (2005) used a thematic approach when analysing their data, but unlike the other studies, their research was largely participatory as young people with learning difficulties were given the opportunity to conduct and analyse the data generated in order to identify the themes that stood out for them. This inclusive approach towards data analysis was admirable, however, the authors provided no information about how the young people were assisted in the process, for example were the themes created independently or largely guided by the lead researchers?

Some studies did not provide any information about the data analysis methods used and instead appeared to opt for a more descriptive approach when providing an account of their study's data and findings. For example, Dee (2002); Ward et al. (2003); Smyth & McConkey, 2003; and Heslop & Abbott (2008) all provided descriptive accounts. In doing so the reliability of these studies' contribution can be questioned as a rigorous and reliable method of analysis did not appear to be employed (Brink, 1993).

When reporting findings, nine of the studies provided a varying amount of direct quotations from their data collected in order to illustrate the interpretations drawn from the data by the researchers (Heslop & Abbott, 2008; Ward et al., 2003; Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Maddison & Beresford, 2012; MacIntyre 2014; Smyth & McConkey, 2003; Dee 2002; Murphy et al., 2010; and Pilnick et al., 2011). Two of the studies however, (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010) did not provide any direct quotes to demonstrate how conclusions had been drawn, which is a weakness as the use of such evidence adds to the transparency of the research because it "affords readers access to the evidence or data used to support empirical research claims made" and the opportunity to "appreciate the richness and nuance of what sources actually say" in relation to the claims made by the authors (Moravcsik, 2014, p.48).

### **2.7.6 Psychological Models and Theoretical Perspectives**

A number of the studies did not include a discussion of theoretical models and perspectives when interpreting the data. However, three of the studies did, for example, Gillan & Coughlan (2010) presented their analysis of the impact of the transition experiences on parents using links to systemic theory; Maddison & Beresford (2012) referred to Soman's (2004) 'four-stage decision-making process' framework in order to explore the parents' experiences of this around their youngster's post-transition choices. Lastly, Pilnick et al, (2011) drew on Young's (2001) conceptualisation of self-determination theory.

### **2.8 Thematic Content of the Studies**

A thematic approach will be used to summarise the literature in this review and to identify the key themes and findings of the research included (Aveyard, 2014). This approach involves a three-step process, which consists of: a critical summary of all included studies (included in the previous sections); assigning themes to the data (Appendix 6); and comparing and contrasting the findings in relation to the themes, which will be presented in the following sections.

#### **2.8.1 Views of Post-school Transition**

It was evident from the parents' reports regarding their experience of their youngster's post-school transition, that a number of them viewed it as the movement from one stage in life to another. For example the parents in Gillan & Coughlan's research (2010, p.199) viewed transition as "movement from school to employment" but placed little attention on other aspects linked to adult life such as living arrangements. Tarleton & Ward (2005) found that parents viewed transition as "their young person growing towards adulthood and adult responsibility" (p.73), which some welcomed and implemented by encouraging their youngsters to begin to make decisions about their lives (Maddison & Beresford, 2012).

It was reported however, that the young people in the studies rarely associated the transition from full-time education with their move from childhood to adulthood, but did express enthusiasm about what the future had in store with regards to new experiences and privileges such as increased privacy, being treated like an adult and in some cases being able to drink alcohol (Murphy et al., 2010; MacIntyre, 2014).

Although some parents recognised that their youngsters had taken on adult or young adult status, a number viewed their son or daughter as occupying “a space between childhood and adulthood” (Murphy et al., 2010, p.68). Parents also stated that although their youngsters had reached adulthood they were unable to conform to society’s view of the ‘adult role’ and were still dependent and in some cases needed constant support and supervision (Murphy et al., 2010). In contrast however, some parents experienced transition as less of a sense of moving on and growing up and more around finding alternative provision to keep the young people occupied during the day (Maddison & Beresford, 2012).

### **2.8.2 Transition Planning**

Transition planning should take place during young peoples’ Annual Review meetings however research included in this review revealed that a number of the families were “unaware of there even being a transition plan” for their sons or daughters (Heslop & Abbott, 2008, p.15). Ward et al. (2003) also found that for a number of young people who had already moved on from school, they and their parents were unaware or had not experienced any transition planning. However, caution should be taken when interpreting these findings, as they are the views of the young people that have been reported by their parents (Ward et al., 2003). Such findings do however provide evidence that a number of young people with learning difficulties leave full-time education without a transition plan and have not been a part of any planning processes, which

does not support positive post-school outcomes for the young people (DfE, 2011) and is also in direct contrast with recent government legislation and guidance such as the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE, 2015).

Tarleton and Ward (2005) found that parents “commonly lacked any understand of the transition process” citing that they were unaware that such planning included “all aspects of the young person’s life” as opposed to solely planning for their move from school to college (p.73). Similar findings from Ward et al. (2003) also reported that parents experienced transition planning as focusing on education and independent living with less attention placed on other topics such as “leisure and social opportunities” (Ward et al., 2003, p.134). Parents also expressed a “lack of coordination between child and adult services” and felt that appropriate facilities were not provided for their youngster, which “emerged as a significant source of stress” (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010, p.200). Some parents also expressed that transition planning did not focus on exploring anxieties associated with the move from full-time education but instead focused on the “completion of formalities” associated with the process, which was experienced as frustrating (Dee, 2002, p.17).

### **2.8.3 Involvement and Decision-making**

Parents reported concerns regarding lack of involvement related to decision-making for their youngsters’ post-school educational arrangements (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010). A number of parents also expressed that they felt they had to fight to get the support their youngster needed because their views were not listened to (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010). In contrast however, Ward et al. (2003) found that two-thirds of the parents involved in their study felt involved in making decision for their son or daughter’s transition and were “directly invited to contribute their views to the transition planning process” (Ward et al., 2003, p134), compared

to one-third who felt that they were only involved a little. Observations of transition meetings revealed that some parents often felt confident about contributing to meetings and were able to regularly draw on their personal knowledge and experiences during the discussions (Pilnick et al., 2011). It was also observed that professionals actively sought the views of parents during the process (Pilnick et al., 2011).

There was however, a minority of parents who reported taking a passive or inactive role during decision-making during processes because they saw it as the professional's position or were confident with the arrangements proposed for their son or daughter (Maddison & Beresford, 2012). 'Power' was identified as being prominent during some of the transition planning meetings as parents reportedly demonstrated 'power' over the young people and the professionals as their views were "more likely to be listened to than those of the pupils" (Dee, 2002, p.17). In contrast however, Heslop & Abbott (2008) found that when professionals attempted to involve the views of young people regarding their next placement their voices were passive in the process as they were only asked their opinion in relation to choices that had one option as opposed to being given a range of options to choose from.

Regarding the young people and their involvement in making decisions, the research findings illustrated that they enjoyed playing an active role in decision-making related to their transition from school and liked talking about and being able to make their own choices and decisions about their future (Ward et al., 2003). Smyth & McConkey's (2003) research also demonstrated that young people with learning difficulties (such as severe difficulties) were able to contribute to their post-school transition planning especially when articulating wishes related to what they would like to do when they left school. However, despite evidence which has found that young people with differing degrees of learning difficulties are able to express themselves and their

future aspirations, research has found a clear link between the severity of one's learning difficulty and "the extent to which they were allowed ... to contribute to the decision-making process" (Dee, 2002, p17). For example, the parents of young people with less severe difficulties expressed that the young people's views were honoured even when they opposed their own. In contrast, it was found that parents' "own agendas" (Pilnick et al., 2011, p.313), were made more explicit when the young people had more severe difficulties, even though professionals (e.g. teachers and transition coordinators) attempted to encourage the young people to make decisions (Maddison & Beresford, 2012). Possible explanations for such practices were provided by Murphy et al. (2010), who found that some parents were resistant to the idea of young people making choices because they did not feel that they were able to make their own decisions and worried that they would make "poor choices" (Murphy et al, 2010, p70).

#### **2.8.4 Information provided during the process**

A number of parents expressed concerns about being provided with appropriate information related to the transition process (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Heslop & Abbott, 2008; Dee, 2002). Dee (2002) also found that parents felt professionals did not always recognise their fears related to requests for information during transition meetings, which resulted in them having to rely on their own local support networks to provide information. Such support also played a huge role in "shaping parental views and opinions" during the transition process (Dee, 2002, p.18).

Ward et al. (2003) also found that providing appropriate information also appeared to be an issue for the parents as it was found that less than half of them in their research felt their information needs had been met during their son or daughter's post-school transition. In addition, less than a quarter of the parents in the study expressed that they "had been provided with written

information about a range of relevant services” available (Ward et al., 2003, p.134). Similarly, Heslop & Abbott (2008) found that “few families felt they had enough appropriate information” (p.16), provided during the transition from full-time education to post-school provision and felt that this experience was also made difficult given the fact that the parents felt they “were out of touch with local services” (Heslop & Abbott, 2008, p.16).

When some parents felt their information needs related to their child’s next stage in life were not being met they spent time gathering information on their own from sources such as the internet, which was felt to reduce their feelings of over reliance on professionals (Maddison & Beresford, 2012). There were also parents who “doubted professionals’ impartiality” (Maddison & Beresford, 2012, p.480) and felt that the information they were provided with was biased and influenced by funding issues as opposed to the young people’s needs.

Parents also expressed wishes regarding their youngsters’ involvement in the process arguing that they should receive more information about their transition, good information about the possible choices available to them and how they could play an active role in contributing to the process and making decisions about their future (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Heslop & Abbott, 2008). When exploring the information needs of the young people some expressed that they wanted information related to different aspects of their transition (college, work, housing, money and relationships), which could help them “to be in charge of their lives and to live more independently” (Tarleton & Ward, 2005, p.73).

The research also highlighted the importance of how information should be presented to young people with learning difficulties and parents during post-school transition and preparation. For example Tarleton & Ward (2005) found that the use of images and simple language was highly

valued, along with information being provided in transition information packs and presentations by speakers from relevant agencies during post-school transition. In Ward et al. (2003, p.135) the young people also reported that they “liked seeing videos” because it helped them to make decisions about their future. Parents also held a similar view about the presentation of information to their youngsters as they expressed that information should be provided in a meaningful way in order to support them with being able to “make an informed decision about their options for the future” (Heslop & Abbott’s, 2007, p.493). Visits to possible post-school provision, the opportunity to speak to school and college leavers about their experiences of transition, an information officer and accessible databases of local provision were also felt to be appropriate ways of presenting information about transition to the young people (Heslop & Abbott, 2007).

### **2.8.5 Support during Post-school Transition**

A number of factors have been found to support parents and young people during their post-school transition. For example, parents have reported that they value being listened to and feeling that their views have been heard, participating in discussions about future opportunities for their sons or daughters and being kept informed about what is happening (Ward et al., 2003, p.135). Parents also reported that a number of factors positively contributed to successful post-school transition for their youngsters including: good information about post-school options for their son or daughter; good forward planning, which allowed a range of options to be identified; less uncertainty and increased transparency around funding arrangements; timely allocation of a good social worker; family members being able to take the lead in the transition process; continuity of care between current and future placements; the opportunity to connect with other parents who have experienced similar processes; opportunities for employment and vocational training; involvement of key professionals (e.g. Connexions advisors); school staff who are able



to visit possible future provision with the young people in advance of their move; regular communication with teaching staff both in school and adult services; and continuity of the young peoples' existing friendships (Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Heslop & Abbott, 2008; Ward et al., 2003; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010).

In contrast however, research has found that barriers to successful post-school transition has included parents' "own reluctance to provide their young adults with opportunities for independence" because of their "perceived vulnerability" (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010, p.199-200), which therefore limits post-school options. Parents also reported barriers associated with not being able to routinely visit potential post-school settings (especially those out of the area) due to availability of time, associated costs and the distance of placements, which in turn meant that the young people did not have the opportunity to be involved in deciding whether or not the placement was right for them (Maddison & Beresford, 2012). Other factors such as competitive job markets and the feeling that employers held negative attitudes towards employing individuals with learning difficulties were also felt to be barriers as it made it difficult to support the youngster with being able to pursue their employment aspirations (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010).

### **2.8.6 Post-school Transition and Future Aspirations**

Research indicates that a large majority of the young people expected to move on to work or college after leaving full-time education (MacIntyre, 2014; Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Smyth & McConkey, 2003). For example, Smyth & McConkey (2003) found that the young people in their study (41 out of 44) transitioning from full-time education to post-school provision frequently expressed the desire to work, which was based on their previous work experience opportunities at school. MacIntyre, (2014) also found that the vast majority of the young people in her study appeared motivated to find a job or go to college and such motivation did not appear

to be related to economic or financial gain but rather to the desire to be included and to “develop friendships and social networks” (MacIntyre, 2014, p.867). Similarly, Tarleton & Ward (2005) found that a large majority of the young people in their study expected to move on to work or college and looked forward to developing a social life and relationships after leaving full-time education.

Parents also expressed aspirations for their youngsters with learning difficulties, such as hoping to see them taking part in activities such as work or education as opposed to solely attending day care, but acknowledged that the possibility of full-time employment would be difficult given the young peoples’ needs (Smyth & McConkey, 2003). There were also some parents who did not have aspirations for their youngster because of their uncertainty about what the future would hold for them after leaving full-time education (Smyth & McConkey, 2003). Similarly, a small number of young people and their parents did not show enthusiasm or aspiration towards employment as they feared that doing so would result in them “losing their entitlement to benefits” and funding (MacIntyre, 2014, p.866).

### **2.8.7 The Emotional Impact of Post-school Transition**

It has been found that post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties and their parents has been experienced as a “significant emotional journey” (Maddison & Beresford, 2012, p.484). Despite this however, the emotional impact of transition on young people and their parents and carers during post-school transition has not been the focus of many research studies. Research which has explored aspects of the emotional impact however, has found that young people experience “loss of the highly supported and highly structured” environment as they move on to new provision where they have to “manage the demands of adapting to an unfamiliar ... and less well-supported mainstream adult service system” (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010, p.200).

It was also found that young people who left residential schools and colleges and did not have post-school provision to move on to experienced their time of transition as difficult because they were leaving the “security of their ‘home’ for the last three years ... and entering an extremely uncertain future” (Heslop & Abbott, 2008, p.16), and experienced social isolation as they were away from their peers.

Research which has explored parents’ experiences in this area has identified a range of negative feelings during the process such as stress, which has been associated with their experiences of limited options available to meet the needs of their youngsters and anxiety, worry, guilt, panic and “anticipated loss” (Maddison & Beresford, 2012, p.484), associated with moving on into a future that is felt to be uncertain (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010). Parents also experienced fears around “letting go” (Maddison & Beresford, 2012, p.484), and placing their child into the care of others and frustration linked to “dealing with inflexible and unresponsive services”, (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010, p.199), which led to a sense of disempowerment. Some parents however, experienced having to take on the role as an “advocate, activist and combatant” in order to “fight” to meet the needs of their youngsters, which they experienced as “immensely difficult and stressful” and reported that in order to cope during this time they had to block out their thoughts associated with such feelings (Heslop & Abbott, 2007, p.492).

Research has also found that some parents felt worried about their youngsters’ ability to take on responsibilities associated with being a young adult and were scared because they did not know what their role in the transition process was (Tarleton and Ward, 2005) and experienced anxiety related to wanting to make the right choices for their youngsters during this important time, especially as those with more severe cognitive impairments were unable to make such decisions independently (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010).

Despite the negative emotional experiences associated with transition, positive experiences have also been reported. For example, some parents associated this time with “increased freedom” (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010, p.199), for themselves and expressed that their son and daughter’s transition from childhood to adulthood signaled increased independence for the young people, especially with regards to leaving the family home. However, this was not a widely held view as some parents “feared” living apart from their youngster as it was felt that they would have a “poorer quality of life” due to their vulnerability and reduced independence associated with their learning difficulties (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010, p.199).

## **2.9 Summary of Literature reviewed and the Current Research**

The existing literature has revealed that although practices associated with post-school transition should be heavily influenced by government policy and practice (DoH, 2001; DfE, 2011; DfE, 2015), young people with learning difficulties and their parents and carers continue to report varied experiences of the process. For example, in relation to transition planning research has revealed that some parents and young people were unaware of such planning taking place or did not play an active role in the process. In other cases young people left full-time education without any plans. The research also revealed feelings regarding a lack of involvement by parents in decision-making, while others took on a more passive role as they felt that it was the job of the professionals to make decisions. In contrast however, some parents felt involved and able to contribute their views during the process.

The existing literature has also highlighted that factors valued by young people and parents included: the amount of information provided and the way in which it was presented; support from professionals which included regular communication and being listened to; support with funding; and opportunities for vocational training and employment upon leaving school. It was

also noted however, that such aspirations were not held by all parents as a small number reported that they were worried about their youngster leaving school and having to take up increased responsibilities or were not as keen to encourage vocational pathways for fear of losing benefits and funding. Given the introduction of the raised age of participation (DfE, 2014), this research aims to further explore experiences of post-school transition and what young people and parents feel is necessary in supporting them with their post-school arrangements, especially as it has been found that lower numbers of young people with learning difficulties take up continued education or training.

Although the existing literature consists of the views of young people and parents and carers, the amount of attention that the studies actually place on the young people's views is lacking in comparison to the parental experiences discussed. For example, data such as extracts from the young people's transcripts were rarely presented in the literature and instead consisted of what appeared to be their parent's or the researcher's interpretations of their experiences. It is therefore important to include the views of young people as such knowledge can support professionals and those involved during this period with providing the right support for them so that positive outcomes can be achieved. This study aims to address this by clearly exploring and presenting the views of both young people and their parents so that readers can learn about their experiences and can see how interpretations are arrived at.

The use of qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups and group discussions (during planning meetings), have offered some understanding of young people and parents' experience of post-school transition. In addition, the use of qualitative analytic methods such as Grounded Theory, Thematic Analysis, Conversation Analysis, the identification of themes in data and providing explanatory accounts of data gathered has also provided insight into this topic of

study. However, as explanations of some of the analytic methods employed were not clearly described, the rigorousness of such research can be questioned. In turn this research aims to produce data and an approach to its analysis that is transparent and replicable through the use of semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, 1996). Using IPA in this study will also provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' 'lived experiences' during this life-changing event. This will be further discussed in chapter 3.

While previous research in this area has been explored from a range of disciplines such as Sociology, Social Policy, Health Sciences, Nursing, Education and Clinical Psychology, this study will explore the phenomenon from the perspective of Educational Psychology in order to ascertain the role that Educational Psychologists can play during this time, given that they are now required to work with young people up to the age of 25 years old and have the potential to play a significant role in supporting them and their parents during this crucial time.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology and Data Collection**

### **3.1 Overview:**

This chapter will explore and discuss the research methodology and design, employed in this study. An outline of the research paradigm; methods of data collection; participant selection and recruitment; procedure; data analysis; and validity and quality issues will also be included. Finally a discussion regarding the ethical considerations associated with this research will be reviewed.

### **3.2 Research Paradigms**

For the purpose of this research an appropriate research paradigm, design, method of data collection and analysis were chosen in order to explore and address the research questions. A research paradigm has been described as a worldwide view that “defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107). Four major paradigms have been identified: Positivist/Postpositivist; Constructivist; Transformative; and Pragmatic (Mertens & Mclaughlin, 1995). Guba (1990) proposed that paradigms could be categorised in terms of their ontology and epistemology.

Ontology “is concerned with the nature of the world” and asks the question “What is there to know?” (Willig, 2013, p.12). Ontological positions lie on a spectrum consisting of ‘realist’ ontology which posits that the world “is made up of structures and objects that have cause-effect relationships with one another” (Willig, 2013, p.12), and ‘relativist’ ontology which acknowledges the diverse nature in the world and the idea that different interpretations can be used to understand it. As the aim of this research was to understand the personal experiences of a

group of young people and their parents through the examination of a small number of cases, the ontological position adopted by the researcher in this study was relativist. This position was chosen because it claims “objective facts are an illusion and that knowledge is constructed by each individual through a unique personal framework” (Coolican, 2004, p.241). This standpoint opposes the critical realist position, which believes that “there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions ... and constructions” (Maxwell, 2012, p.5), which stands in direct opposition of this study’s aims.

Silverman (1993) suggested that the approach a researcher decides to take towards research and interpreting data collected is influenced by their epistemological position (Silverman, 1993 as cited in Willig, 2013). Epistemology has been described as “a branch of philosophy, concerned with the theory of knowledge” and attempts to explore questions such as “How and what, can we know?” (Willig, 2013, p.4). A positivist epistemology proposes, “there is a straightforward relationship between the world ... and our perception, and understanding, of it” (Willig, 2013, p.4). This position therefore suggests that the goal of conducting research is to generate objective and unbiased knowledge, free from any personal involvement or interpretation from the researcher (Willig, 2013).

The epistemological position adopted by the researcher in this study however stands in opposition to the positivist stance as it is a constructivist standpoint, which claims that individuals construct their own world, that “knowledge is relative and a unique construction for each person” (Coolican, 2004 p.220). This position also acknowledges that multiple perspectives exist (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007), which may be similar or contradictory, but recognises that all are “equally valid” viewpoints of the world (Gray, 2013). By employing a constructivist approach in this study knowledge will be gained by exploring the views and perspectives of



young people with moderate learning difficulties and their parents regarding their experiences of post-school transition. Mertens & Mclaughlin (1995) claimed that the constructivist approach is suited to special education research.

### **3.3 Research Design**

Babbie & Mouton (2002) describe a research design as a plan or blueprint that acts as a guide for how research will be carried out, taking into consideration the research paradigm adopted by the researcher. Due to the research questions and aims for this study (stated in chapter one), and the associated ontological and epistemological stance, employed by the researcher, a qualitative research design, which was exploratory, subjective and constructivist was employed. The rationale behind employing qualitative research techniques stemmed from the fact that such methods focus on meaning, individuals' subjective experiences (Willig, 2013), and the way in which they "make sense of and understand their world" (Eatough, as cited in Breakwell, Smith & Wright, 2012, p.323). Qualitative methodology also focuses on the quality of an individual's experiences and the meanings they attribute to them as opposed to identifying the "cause-effect relationships" (Willig, 2013, p.8). This in turn meant that the use of variables and predictions were not appropriate in this research as there was no intention to test set hypotheses or to quantify data collected (Creswell, 2014).

Adopting the use of a qualitative approach was also deemed appropriate for this study as it is viewed as "particularly suited to giving a voice" to individuals with disabilities whose voices are rarely represented in research (Becker, 1966 as cited in Beresford, 1997, p.16) and provided an understanding of each individual's experience in relation to post-school transition rather than attempting to test or verify explanations or theories which quantitative research sets out to do (Creswell, 2014).

### **3.3.1 Interpretation and Qualitative Research Design**

Alvesson & Skoldberg (2002) suggested that historically a large amount of qualitative data had “implicitly adhered to a positivist epistemology” (as cited in Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008, p.8), because researchers occasionally “avoided overt interpretation”, preferring to re-present data and meaning generated by participants “in the form of descriptive themes” (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008, p.7). However, more recently, researchers who have adopted the use of qualitative approaches are increasingly moving away from solely presenting “careful description” as research findings (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008, p.8) and towards engaging in interpretation, which offers understanding as opposed to an explanation of a phenomenon. However, it has also been acknowledged that “interpretation is inexhaustible” (Cohn, 2005 as cited in Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008, p.9) as it produces knowledge, which is partial in nature. With this in mind, this research aims to understand the post-school transition experiences of two groups of individuals and does not aim to produce certainties or definitive answers regarding the phenomenon of post-school transition.

According to Ricoeur (1970), there is a range of interpretive standpoints that researchers can adopt in qualitative research. This research adopted the stance proposed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996).

### **3.3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

IPA was developed in the 1990’s by Jonathan A. Smith and is an in-depth qualitative method of data analysis, which is described as an approach, which is “committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.1). IPA gained popularity in the United Kingdom within the field of Health Psychology (Finlay, 2011), and is now used in psychology and other associated disciplines to address experiential topics

(Smith & Osborn, 2015).

IPA is a qualitative approach whose philosophical knowledge and underpinnings have been informed by: phenomenology as it is concerned with: how individuals perceive experiences, events or objects (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003 as cited in Eatough & Smith, 2008); an “idiographic sensibility” (Finlay, 2011, p.140), which places emphasis on “the particular rather than the universal” and therefore maintains the specific examination of the individual’s experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.183); and “the commitment to a hermeneutic approach” (Finlay, 2011, p.140), which has been described as “the theory of interpretation” (Smith et al., 2009, p.21).

### **3.3.2.1 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is an approach, which focuses on “the study of experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p.11), and in particular “the individual’s subjective experiences” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003 in Mertens, 2005, p.240). The work of four major philosophers: Husserl (1927), Heidegger (1967), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Satre (1948) each made unique contributions towards the concept of phenomenology in a way, which was “consistent with a core phenomenology” (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p12). For example, Husserl (1927) proposed that phenomenology emphasises the importance of “that which is experienced in the consciousness of the individual”, which has the ability to “identify the core structures and features of human experience” (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.13).

Heidegger (1967) who was Husserl’s student felt that his theory was “too abstract” and introduced a hermeneutic version of phenomenology. Heidegger’s (1967) was concerned with “existence itself” and the view of an individual “as always and indelibly a worldly person-in-

context” (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.17). He also emphasised the concept of intersubjectivity, which refers to the “shared, overlapping and relational nature” of the way in which we engage in the world and are able to “communicate with and make sense of, each other” (Smith et al., 2009, p.17).

Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) view of phenomenology proposes that individuals view themselves as different from all things in the world, because one’s sense of self is “holistic and is engaged in looking at the world, rather than being subsumed within it” (Smith et al., 2009, p.18). Unlike Heidegger (1967) who focused on worldliness, Merleau-Ponty (1962) placed his attention on “the embodied nature of our relationship to the world” and knowledge of it (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.18).

Lastly, Satre (1948) develops on Heidegger’s (1967) philosophy by suggesting that “existence comes before essence” (Satre, 1948, p.26 as cited in Smith et al, 2009, p.19), and that individuals are constantly becoming themselves and so the self is not viewed as a “pre-existing unity to be discovered” but instead a project which can continually be explored (Smith et al., 2009, p.19). Satre (1948) also emphasised the importance of things that are absent as well as things that are present “in defining who we are and how we see the world” (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.189).

Smith et al. (2009) expressed that phenomenological philosophy is valuable for Psychologists as it provides “a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p.11). Phenomenology aims to “understand and describe the event from the point of view of the participant” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003 in Mertens, 2005, p.240), and also recognises that a range of factors such as an individual’s wishes or desires can have an impact on

the way in which individuals perceive reality and their experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The theoretical basis of phenomenology (Husserl, 1927) has influenced IPA as it focuses on the individual's experiences by inviting participants to share their experience in their own words, as they view it (as cited in Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.3.2.2 Idiography**

Unlike nomothetic research, which seeks out “generalizable findings that uncover laws to explain objective phenomena” (Coyle, in Lyons & Coyle, 2007, p.14), idiography does not seek to generalise but rather focuses on the analysis of individual cases in order to make cautious general claims about a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA is idiographic as it focuses on the individual's perception of how they make sense of their experiences (Finlay, 2011). This is achieved through the “detailed examination of particular cases” (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p27) before moving on to cross-case analysis “within and between” cases (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.183).

It has been argued that by “probing deeper into the particular” (Warnock, 1987 as cited in Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.183), and studying the experiences of individuals, it can “illuminate and affirm” (Eatough & Smith 2008, p.183), “the centrality of certain general themes in the lives of ... particular individuals” (Evans, 1993, p.8), which in turn can connect the unique experiences of the individual to common humanity (Eatough & Smith, 2008). This study was idiographic in nature as it consisted of the “detailed ... examination” (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p.45) of the participants' experiences of post-school transition.

### **3.3.2.3 Hermeneutics**

A key influence in IPA is hermeneutics, which has been described as the theory of interpretation

(Smith et al., 2009). The hermeneutic circle has been described as “the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels” (Smith et al., 2009, p.28), and suggests that in order to understand the whole, one must look its constituent parts and in order to understand a given part, one must look at the whole (Smith et al., 2009). Such thinking illustrates the dynamic and non-linear process of interpretation and the idea that it is not linear but instead a more dynamic approach to thinking (Smith et al., 2009).

The act of making interpretations within IPA is also based on a process of double hermeneutics, which Smith (2004) suggested is the process whereby an individual attempts to “make sense of their personal and social world” (Smith, 2004, p.40), and the researcher attempts to make sense of the way in which the individual makes sense of their personal experience. This approach to interpretation is useful as individuals may “struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling” (Smith & Eatough as cited in Lyons & Coyle, 2007, p.36) or may choose not to disclose their personal experiences, which the researcher can explore through the use of interpretation based on what the individual has said.

According to Smith et al. (2009) the participant’s interpretation can be viewed as first order sense making whilst the researchers interpretation can be viewed as second order (Smith et al., 2009). The use of hermeneutics in this research provided a richer understanding of the participants’ lived experiences, which supported the exploration of the research questions.

#### **3.3.2.4 Summary of IPA as an Analytic Process**

This method of data analysis has been selected because it places strong emphasis on exploring an individual’s experience of a particular phenomenon and encourages them to communicate and share their lived experiences as they interpret it (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2004). IPA

is also suited to this study as it is “interested in looking in detail at how someone makes sense” (Smith et al., 2009, p.3), of a life event, which in this case would be post-school transition. This method of analysis was also felt to be appropriate for this research as it offered a flexible and an “accessible approach to phenomenological research that adhered to guidelines regarding rigour and validity” (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011, p.24).

The researcher considered using Discourse Analysis (DA), which can be split into Foucauldian DA and discursive psychology to analyse the data generated as both focus on the “detailed examination of language”, (Robson, 2011, p.372). However, DA is a social constructionist approach, which places emphasis on “public and collective reality as constructed through language use” (Lyons & Coyle, 2007, p.100), and therefore would not have suited this research, as its aim is to focus on the lived experiences of the young people and their parents.

### **3.3.3 Multi-perspective Research Designs**

Multi-perspective approaches to qualitative research are increasingly being used as they recognise that “a situation may have more than one interpretation” (della Porta & Keating, 2008, p.34) worth exploring. According to Kendall, Murray, Carduff, Worth, Harris, Lloyd, Cavers, Grant, Boyd & Sheikh (2010), when carrying out their research they felt that this approach was useful as it sought to: “understand relationships and dynamics among patients, their families, and professional carers; explore similarities and differences in the perceptions of patients and their family and professional carers; and understand individual needs of patients, carers, and professionals” (Kendall et al., 2010, p.340). For the purpose of this research, multiple-perspectives were viewed as a number of different perspectives (the young people and their parents’) on the shared experience of post-school transition.

By exploring the experiences of post-school transition from more than one perspective (young people and parents) in this study, the researcher had the opportunity to “reveal something of the experience of each of those individuals” (Smith et al., 2009, p.3), which resulted in a “more detailed” and “multi-faceted account” (Smith et al., 2009, p.52) of the experience, which highlighted common experiences and differences that occurred across individuals and cases (Polkinghorne, 2005).

### **3.4 Research Procedures**

The following section will describe the research methods used within this research, including: participant selection and recruitment; data collection (including semi-structured interviews); and data analysis.

#### **3.4.1 Research Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to select participants in this research as the research questions required a certain degree of homogeneity amongst the participants in order to increase validity and gain an in-depth understanding of the views of young people and their parents during post-school transition.

Purposive sampling is a form of non-random sampling where the selection of participants is made on the basis of which individuals “are most representative for the issues involved in the research or who has appropriate expertise in the matter” (Coolican, 2004, p.42). This method of sampling was chosen because it ensures that there is a certain degree of homogeneity amongst the participants as they are “selected according to criteria of relevance to the research question” (Willig, 2013, p.91). This is also essential as the use of IPA stipulates that participants must have experience of the phenomenon that is being investigated (Smith et al., 2009), which in this case



are the experiences of post-school transition. It was however acknowledged that the young people in this research had individual needs related to their learning difficulties that presented differently due to the unique qualities each of the young people possessed.

Gaining permission to access potential participants consisted of a number of stages: firstly, ethical approval was sought before carrying out the research. The researcher ensured that the British Psychological Society's Ethical Guidelines were carefully considered and met by submitting an ethics application form to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust's Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 10). The application stated the intentions of the research study and detailed the identified ethical issues that needed to be considered whilst carrying out the research (British Psychological Society, 2004).

The researcher also received approval from her Educational Psychology Team Manager and Principal Educational Psychologist to carry out the research in one of the County's Special Needs Schools (the school remained anonymous during this process). School selection took place by assessing locally held information (such as school websites) and the County's guidance on Specialist Provision in the area. Based on the information found, the researcher identified a school which taught pupils between the ages of 4-17 years old and who were identified as having Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD). The researcher then approached the school, as it was felt the pupils aged 17 would be appropriate participants to contribute to exploring the set research questions. When the school was approached, permission was requested from the Head Teacher who agreed that the researcher could recruit participants from the school's sixth-form unit and the recruitment process began.

The school's Assistant Head Teacher (AHT) used the following inclusion criteria created by the researcher to identify the young people (along with their parents) who were included in the study:

- Young people with a primary need in the area of moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and who may also have additional needs associated with behavioural and emotional or physical and sensory difficulties, which has an impact on their ability to learn
- Young people currently transitioning from a school for pupils with MLD to a post-16 Further Education College
- Young people who have a functional level of communication and verbal skills necessary to cope with the demands of an interview, which will be assessed using public information held by the school (e.g. communication passports) and discussions with school staff for further verification.
- Young people who have attended their current school for their primary and/ or secondary education.

Once potential participants were identified, the AHT contacted them via telephone and email in order to invite the young people and one of their parents to take part in the research. As it was recognised that parents and carers continue to support their sons/ daughters as they approach adulthood, all of the parents had the opportunity to talk to their youngsters about the research and to consider and review the information (Appendix 7) and consent forms (Appendix 8) so they could think about whether or not they wanted to be involved. When interest was shown by the potential participants their details were passed on to the researcher so that she could discuss the research in further detail and confirm whether or not they were happy to proceed.

The participants' accounts were presented as three cases each consisting of parent and young people dyads because it produced a "richer understanding of needs and experiences than the single perspective most commonly used in qualitative studies" and allows for the exploration of "complex complementary as well as contradictory perspectives" (Kendall et al., 2010, p.340).

Given the idiographic nature of IPA a sample of six participants were recruited, which is considered a small sample however the rationale behind using a small sample was because the research aimed to represent the perspectives of individuals "rather than a population" (Smith et al., 2009, p.49). Furthermore, Smith et al. (2009) suggested that for IPA, four to 10 participants is sufficient for professional doctorate research and allow for a considerable amount of time and attention for in-depth analysis and interpretation needed for each participant. It is also suggested that research using IPA should consist of a reasonable number of interviews, which can be analysed in order to "provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants" (Smith et al., 2009, p.51), which this research has fulfilled by carrying out two interviews with each of the six participants. sample, however

<i><b>Participant</b></i>	<i><b>Age</b></i>	<i><b>Special Educational Need</b></i>	<i><b>Length of time spent at School</b></i>	<i><b>Parent/Carer interviewed</b></i>
<b>Ricky</b>	17 (at the time of both interviews)	MLD, Hearing Impairment, Speech and Language difficulties	13 years	Mother
<b>Sabina</b>	17 (at the time of both interviews)	MLD, Hearing Impairment, Speech and Language difficulties and Dyslexia	12 years	Father
<b>Sam</b>	17 (during interview one and 18 during the follow up interview)	MLD, Hearing impairment, speech and language difficulties	3 years	Mother

Table 3.1 Participant demographics

Details regarding the age range of the participants, their identified SEN, the length of time spent at the school and which of their parents participated in the study can be found in Table 3.1. Participants were not included in the study on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or cultural background. However, once identified such information was considered during the interviews and data analysis stage.

### **3.4.2 Methods of Data Collection**

It has been suggested that within qualitative research, conversations form the basis of research interviews as they involve getting to know others and learning about their view of their “experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in” (Kvale, 1996, p.5). The key difference between conversations and research interviews however, is that the latter are carried out with a methodological awareness relating to the types of questions being asked, critical attention to what is being said during the interview and the interaction and dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee (Kvale, 1996). Interviewing was employed as the method of data collection in this study because it attempts to “understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects’ own perspectives” (Kvale, 1996, p.27).

In particular, semi-structured interviewing was employed as the main method of data collection in this study because in addition to offering an element of structure related to the use of interview guides with pre-determined questions (Appendix 9), they are also flexible and provided the opportunity for the participants to be “active agents in shaping” the interview (Smith & Eatough in Lyons and Coyle, 2007, p.42). This in turn allowed the researcher to “explore unpredicted avenues of thought” (Coolican, 2004, p.153), that arose during the interviews in response to the participants’ answers and comments (Kvale, 1996). The rationale behind the questions explored during the interviews stemmed from the original research

questions and the review of literature on post-school transition for young people with learning difficulties and parents and carers.

### **3.4.3 Considerations for Research with Young People with Learning Difficulties**

It has been acknowledged that interviewing individuals with learning difficulties can be a challenging task. Issues such as “capabilities or communication needs” (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995, p.51), has resulted in such individuals being excluded from research, resulting in a “gap in evidence” (McClimens & Allmark, 2011, p.2) and knowledge relating to their experiences.

As the young people included in this study were identified as having MLD and speech and language difficulties, pupil information passports created by the school staff were reviewed prior to the interviews taking place so that any communication or behavioural needs and strategies to support the youngsters were known and could be drawn upon during the interviews if necessary. This ensured that all of the young people had the opportunity to access the interview questions and meaningfully participate during the interviews in order to share their experiences of post-school transition.

While creating the questions for the interviews the researcher monitored the number of questions that required a yes or no answer and when necessary provided neutral prompts to ensure the young people and their parents could understand the questions being asked (Baxter, 2005). It was also considered that the parents may have also had learning difficulties (although none did in this research) and so the use of simple vocabulary and short sentences were used throughout the interviews (Beresford, 1997).

Other issues associated with interviewing young people with learning difficulties have also included ‘acquiescence response bias’ (Holbrook, 2013a), where participants appear to agree with statements made despite their content and ‘recency effect’, which occurs “when response options are more likely to be chosen when presented at the end of a list of response options than when presented at the beginning” (Holbrook, 2013b). In order to identify and avoid such issues Wyngaarden (1981) suggested that researchers should ask the same question in a number of ways in order to compare their responses and ascertain what their answer actually is. During this research, when it was felt that the young people provided any contradictory answers the researcher ensured that the questions were revisited in order to check and clarify their answers (Baxter, 2005).

#### **3.4.4 Rapport Building**

According to Nind (2008, p.6) “the quality of the relationship between the researcher and participants” is important especially with more ‘vulnerable groups’ such as individuals with Special Educational Needs (SEN). With this in mind, the researcher spent some time with the young people before conducting the interviews by taking part in activities of their choice at their home. For example, Sabina wanted to talk about her interests, Sam enjoyed sharing different items that were important to him and Ricky taught the researcher how to play one of his favourite PlayStation games. These activities helped the young people to feel more comfortable and to develop a rapport with the researcher before the interviews took place. The rapport building did however require monitoring so that the young people understood the role of the researcher and did not mistakenly view them as a new ‘friend’ (Cameron & Murphy, 2007 in Nind, 2008). The researcher achieved this by ensuring from the outset, that the participants understood how long they were required to be a part of the research and that the researcher was

interested in their experience of moving from school to college, which would be the focus of the research and of their involvement during the interviews.

Wyngaarden (1981) proposed that when working with individuals with learning difficulties it is important to acknowledge the presence of power imbalance and that there is a danger that they may view researchers as having the 'power' to change their circumstances in either a positive way (fulfilling their wishes expressed) or in a negative way. In turn the researcher explained that their views were being sought in relation to research being carried out. The researcher also clarified her role as a researcher each time she came into contact with the young people by using a 'bag of tools' (Munford et al., 2008), which consisted of objects of reference and visual cues such as a voice recorder and consent forms, so that she could share them with the young people and establish her role as a researcher, each time they met.

### **3.4.5 A 'Bolder' Approach**

The data collection occurred between July 2015 and October 2015 in two stages: the initial interview took place before the young people left the sixth form unit at their school (at the end of the final term); and the follow-up interview took place once they had transitioned to their new college during the first half of the following autumn term. By conducting the interviews twice (before and following their move to college) a 'bolder' approach was adopted (Smith et al, 2009). The rationale behind using this approach when interviewing the participants in the study stemmed from the notion that transition is a process rather than an isolated event and exploring the participants' experiences over time revealed similarities and differences at different points in the process and also illustrated the dynamic process of transition for young people with learning difficulties and their families. The interviews were also conducted in two stages because of the possibility that some individuals with learning difficulties may be better able to relate to, engage

in and talk about experiences as they occur as opposed to talking about events that have happened in the past or which have yet to occur.

During the initial interviews, the young people and their parents had the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about: leaving school; preparation for transition (e.g. explanation of the process, attendance to meetings and involvement in transition planning); experiences of decision-making and whether or not they felt listened to and able to contribute to the process; support received during the process; and the their thoughts about future aspirations (independence, employment, living arrangements etc.).

The follow-up interviews used the information collected from the initial interviews as “a prompt for further discussion” (Smith et al., 2009, p.52) and explored the participants’ feelings towards the aforementioned topics since leaving school in order to find out if similar or different feelings were held. These interviews also prompted discussions about feelings towards: settling into college; experience of building new relationships with peers and staff members; support received during the process; and if the transition process successfully met the needs of the youngsters and prepared them for transition into post-school life.

#### **3.4.6 Materials and Apparatus**

Apparatus used during the study included a voice recorder and the interview schedules for the young people and their parents. The adults and young people were also provided with accessible and clear information sheets (Appendix 7).



### **3.4.7 Procedure**

All of the interviews with the participants took place in a quiet room at each of their homes. It has been suggested that children and young people may benefit from being in an “emotionally supportive environment” (Beresford, 1997, p.26) when taking part in research with an unfamiliar researcher. The interviews with the parents took place separately from the young people. At the start of the young people’s interviews, the parents were present in order to introduce them to the process, normalise the situation and to provide them with a degree of reassurance about their participation. The parents were also available during the interviews to provide support for their youngster in the event that they became emotionally distressed, which did not happen for any of the young people.

At the beginning of the interviews the researcher revisited the purpose of the research with the participants in order to ensure that they understood the implications of their participation and to establish whether or not they were still happy to take part. Once the participants demonstrated that they were happy to do so informed consent was gained and they signed or initialed consent forms and were given a copy to keep for their reference, with the researchers contact details.

The researcher attempted to ensure that there were minimal disruptions from family members in the home during the interviews by putting a ‘do not disturb’ sign on the door if it was felt necessary. During the interviews, the young people were given the opportunity to move around and to take comfort breaks as and when they needed it. Once the interviews were completed, the young people and their parents were debriefed about their participation and given the opportunity to talk about any issues that may have arisen during the interviews. The young people and parents however, did not express any concerns during their debrief.

The follow up interviews with the young people and parents took place two to three months after the first interviews and the researcher started the second round of interviews with each of the participants by reminding them about the purpose of the research, their rights as participants and the ethical considerations associated with their participation. Once all participants agreed and were happy to still be a part of the research the follow up interviews commenced. The initial and follow up interviews ranged from 20 to 50 minutes in duration with the variation in interview timings reflecting the differing needs of the young people and their parents (e.g. speed of communication, levels of attention, concentration and behavioural needs).

All interviews were audio-recorded so that the interviewees' responses were recorded verbatim for transcription at a later date. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to fully engage with the participants during the interviews without having the task of attempting to write everything that was said.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The young people and their parents were interviewed twice, resulting in a total of twelve interview transcripts across the six participants (three cases). The two interviews for each participant were joined together to form one transcript. All interview transcripts were analysed as separate cases and then as grouped as dyads in order to synthesise the data (Kendall, et al., 2010). All of the participants were assigned pseudonyms and places and people mentioned by the participants were also anonymised with pseudonyms.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, 1996) was used to analyse the data collected during the semi-structured interviews. The researcher felt that it was an appropriate tool because:

It is not a prescriptive approach; rather it provides a set of flexible guidelines which can be adapted by individual researchers in light of their research aims (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p.45)

As this study consisted of a “detailed, idiographic examination” (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p.45) of the participants’ experiences of post-school transition, the researcher adopted a cyclical approach when analysing the data, which was repeated with each of the cases.

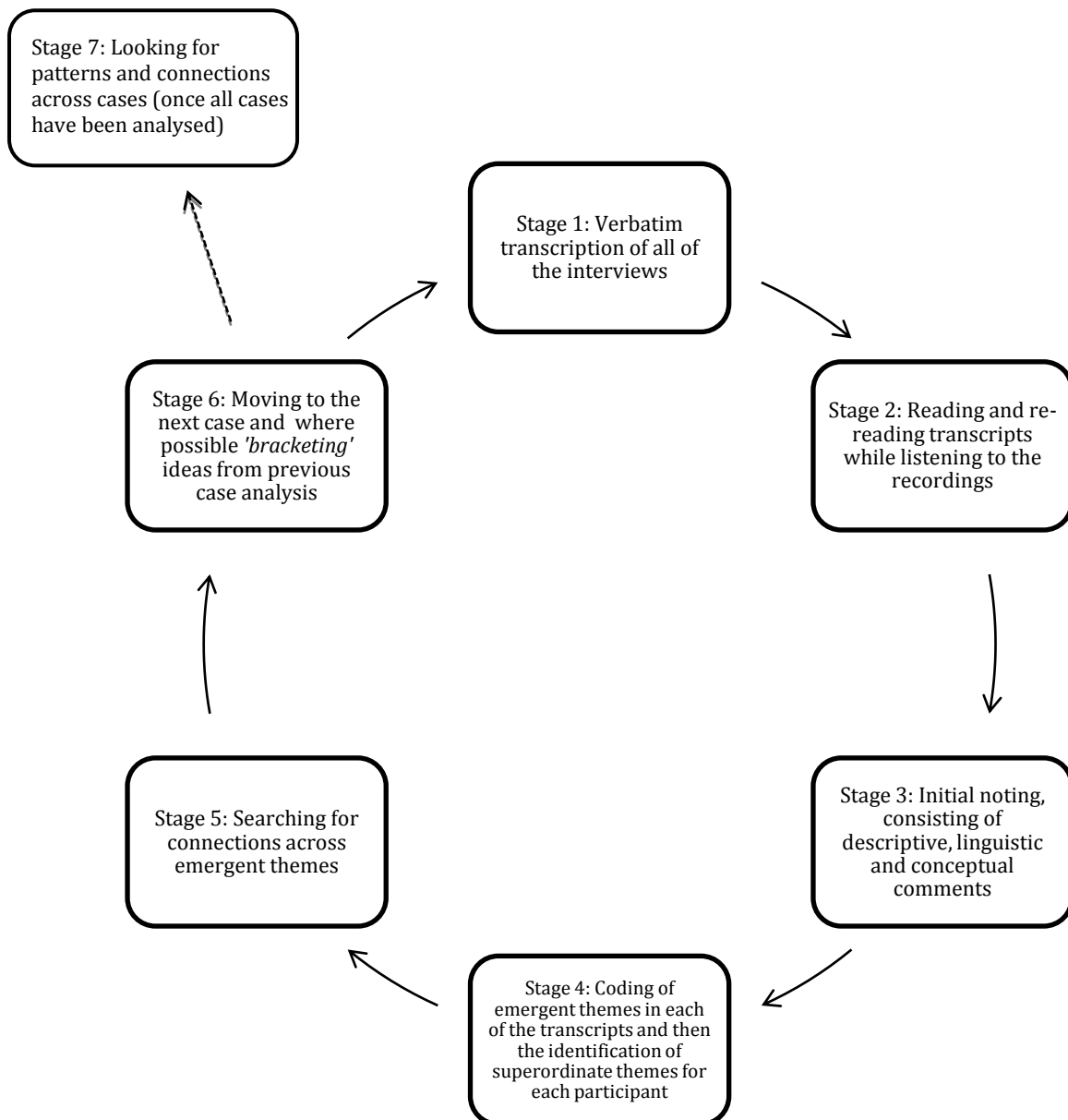


Figure 3.1 IPA Analytical Cycle

Figure 3.1 illustrates the stages of data analysis employed for each of the participants’ interview

transcripts (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2004). Transcribing the interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to experience full immersion in the data and to listen to the interviews again in order to re-experience, familiarise and gain a deeper understanding of what the participants shared.

The case-by-case analysis of the transcripts involved taking one transcript at a time and entering into “a phase of active engagement with the data” (Smith et al., 2009, p.82). As the transcripts were read, descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments about the participants’ accounts were noted down in the margin on the right-hand side of the transcript. The researcher then re-read the transcript, identified emergent themes and noted them down in the margin on the left-hand side. Following this, the researcher looked for any connections across the participant’s identified emergent themes, which was done by listing all of the themes identified on paper, cutting them up and moving them around into clusters in order to “explore the spatial representations of how emergent themes relate to each other” (Smith et al., 2009, p.96) (Appendix 12). Based on the spatial representations of the emergent themes, the process of abstraction took place where “patterns between emergent themes” were identified, grouped together and assigned to super-ordinate themes, which emerged “at a higher level as a result of putting themes together” (Smith et al., 2009, p.96). The initial emergent and super-ordinate themes for the participant’s transcript were then displayed in a table (Appendix 13). Once this process had been completed for the first participant, the researcher moved on to the remaining cases and started the cycle of analysis again, treating each of the cases separately to ensure that the participants’ individuality was respected during the analysis.

Once this had been completed for all of the participants, cross-case analysis took place, which involved exploring all of the transcripts and their emergent and super-ordinate themes in order to

identify the common themes present (Appendix 14). At this stage of analysis, the emergent and super-ordinate themes for each of the participants were looked at collectively and in some cases reconfigured and labeled differently in comparison to the labels initially assigned during the earlier stages as the researcher felt it was a better representation for the participants and their experiences. Such engagement with the data demonstrated the dynamic nature of the hermeneutic cycle in progress, which highlights the importance of looking at the ‘part to whole relationship’ of an experience during analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

The results were then presented in a master table of themes for the group, which illustrated how each of the themes was “nested within super-ordinate themes” for each participant and across cases. Phenomenological evidence in the form of extracts from the transcripts, detailing the page and line numbers (page.line) were provided so that readers are able to locate the evidence in each of the participants’ transcripts with ease and so the evidence trail is transparent (Appendices 11-14).

The data analysis phase of the research approximately took three months (November 2015–February 2016). External support to check the analytic process was sought from the researcher’s supervisor, however as IPA emphasises the importance of the researcher’s interpretation of the data this was focused on more. A worked example of the analytic process (Ricky) can be found in the appendices in order to provide transparency.

### **3.6 Validity Issues**

A number of strategies were employed to uphold the reliability and validity of the study. For example, strategies such as member checking took place when the interviews were transcribed as the participants had the opportunity to check the researcher’s interpretation of their responses

during the interviews, in order to express whether or not they felt they reflected what they were trying to articulate (Creswell, 2014). The researcher also ensured that when reporting the findings a rich description was provided in order to contextualise the interpretations so that readers were provided with “detailed descriptions of the setting” and could see how interpretations had been arrived at. Such practice has been said to “add validity to the findings” (Creswell, 2014, p.202). An audit trail was also kept in order to demonstrate transparency so that an auditor (the researcher’s colleague) could establish whether interpretations made and conclusions drawn could be traced back to their original sources (Creswell, 2014). Peer debriefing was also employed by having discussions with the researcher’s Research Supervisor, who asked pertinent questions about the study as it was carried out in order to ensure that the process was clear and resonated “with people other than the researcher” (Creswell, 2014, p.202).

The researcher also engaged in self-reflection throughout the study in order to avoid researcher bias and to ensure transparency. Demonstrating reflexivity (Finlay & Gough, 2003), requires:

An awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of’ one’s subject matter when conducting research (as cited in Willig, 2008, p.10).

The researcher was aware of her contribution to the research (Creswell, 2014), and the fact that she needed to be mindful of her thoughts, assumptions, and feelings during all phases of the data collection and analysis. In order to ensure reflexivity (Robson, 2011), the use of a research diary (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007), was employed, in which field notes and the researcher’s thoughts and ideas were captured. The diary also included reflections of conducting the interviews and the researcher’s thoughts while analysing the data. By employing the aforementioned strategies, the “credibility” of the research was strengthened and created a more realistic account of the findings (Creswell, 2014, p.202).

### 3.6.1 Validity and IPA

When carrying out qualitative research authors such as Merriam (2002) and Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2002) stressed the importance of producing reliable and valid research in an ethical manner in order to avoid generating worthless research that does not add to wider knowledge base. In order to avoid this the researcher adhered to Yardley's (2000) "four broad principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.180), which has been adopted by Smith et al. (2009) and applied to IPA.

For example, in order to ensure *Sensitivity of context*, the researcher made sure that the participants' voices steered the data interpretation and that all interpretations made by the researcher were transparent so that readers could verify them using the participants' actual words (Smith et al., 2009). *Commitment and rigour* was present during the study as the interviews consisted of the same questions and prompts (adapted to meet the needs of each of the participants) and the researcher ensured that an idiographic approach was maintained throughout the data collection and stages of analysis (Smith et al., 2009). *Transparency and coherence* were maintained, as the research procedure was clear so that others are able to replicate it. The researcher also ensured that the young people and their parents' experiences were illuminated without being influenced to ensure that the views expressed by the participants were their own (Smith et al., 2009). When thinking about *Impact and importance*, Yardley (2000) suggests "real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.183) and so this research aimed to highlight the experiences of parents but also young people with learning difficulties, whose views have tended to be excluded from research on post-school transition. Fulfilling the aforementioned principles supported the researcher's attempts at ensuring that the method adopted, the approach to interpreting the

participants' responses and the findings presented as a result of the data collection and analyses were reliable and valid.

### **3.7 Ethical Issues**

According to Dean, Turner, Cash & Winterbottom (1998, p.58) valid and informed consent “requires a person to appreciate the current situation, possess sufficient information, understand the information given, be able to weigh up the pros and cons, communicate a choice voluntarily and free from coercion” (as cited in Cameron & Murphy, 2006, p.114). With this in mind, the researcher ensured that the young people and their parents who agreed to take part in this research were fully informed about the details of the research, what their participation would involve and what would be done with the data gathered before, their informed consent was given (British Psychological Society, 2004). The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the research process and to have their data removed at any point up until when the data had been transcribed (which they were given a date for when this would occur).

The young people included in this research were all 17 years old and legally considered as being able to consent to taking part in research. However, such decision making for young people with learning difficulties has been a recurring topic of discussion in research (Nind, 2008). According to The Mental Capacity Act (2005), unless evidence suggests otherwise, all adults have the right to make their own decisions (Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2007). The act also states that if an individual is unable to make decisions, or viewed as ‘lacking capacity’ the following should occur for the individual:

- 1) They should have as much help as possible to make their own decisions
- 2) People should assess if the individual can make a particular decision



- 3) If someone has to make a decision on the individual's behalf they must still be involved in this as much as possible
- 4) Anyone making a decision on an individual's behalf must do so in their best interests.

(as cited in Government, citizen and rights, 2012).

The young people included in this study were identified as having moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and so were supported by their parents (Cuskelly, 2005 in Farrell, 2005), to think about whether or not they wanted to participate and were given a week to discuss the opportunity. This occurred as it was acknowledged by the researcher that parents continue to support their sons and daughters with learning difficulties as they approach adulthood (Farrell, 2005).

The researcher also recognised that the young people were able to verbally consent to taking part in the research, but that such consent may not have necessarily equated to a willingness to participate in the study. With this in mind, the researcher drew on suggestions put forward by Cameron & Murphy (2006) who proposed that when working with individuals with learning difficulties, possible positive indicators of giving consent might include: "high levels of engagement (e.g. eye contact and body language); relevant elaboration (e.g. verbal comments indicating a willingness to take part); and positive non-verbal responses (e.g. nodding)" (Cameron & Murphy, 2006, p.115)

Rodgers (1999) also expressed the importance of being aware of when a young person may be refusing to take part in research or the possibility that they may decide or feel that they do not want to continue with their involvement during the process (as cited in Cameron and Murphy, 2006). In such situations, it has been suggested that possible indicators of refusing consent by individuals with learning difficulties may include: 'low levels of engagement (e.g.

lack of eye contact, indifference, discomfort, tiredness); concern that responses are overly acquiescent (e.g. agreeing without clear understanding); and ambivalent nonverbal responses (e.g. negative facial expressions)” (Cameron & Murphy, 2006, p.115). None of the aforementioned behaviours were observed during any of the interviews, but if they did occur, the researcher would have given the participants a number of options including: stopping the interview completely; having a break; or resuming at another time (if it was felt that this was appropriate). Where appropriate, visual ‘stop’ and ‘break’ cards were also provided at the beginning of the interviews for the young people to use at any point to indicate that they wanted the interview to stop. Although none of the young people became distressed during the interviews, arrangements were made to ensure that their parents were on call to support them by reducing any anxiety that they may have experienced and to support them in ending the interviews if they did not wish to continue.

As a small number of participants were included in this research all participants were made aware that the researcher would attempt to maintain anonymity and confidentiality by ensuring that measures were taken to anonymise their identities so that they were not easily identifiable (British Psychological Society, 2004). The only exception to maintaining confidentiality was if there were any disclosures about harm to self and/ or others, which all participants were made aware of. However, this did not present as an issue during the interviews. The researcher also assumed responsibility for the security of all data collected during the research and ensured that it was kept in a secure location. The data was also managed in line with the 5<sup>th</sup> principle of the Data Protection Act (1998) (Information Commissioner’s Office, para. 5).

In order to avoid potential power imbalance during the interviews, the researcher ensured that the participants had the opportunity to question methods employed in the research and were not

forced in any way to answer questions if they preferred not to (although this did not occur in this research) (Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009).

It was not envisaged that participation in this research would harm any of the participants. However, due to the nature of this research, the interviews could have been viewed as intrusive as participants were encouraged to engage in reflective conversations about a significant experience. This could have been a potential risk as it could have triggered unpleasant or upsetting memories for the participants, however, this was not the case during or after any of the participants' interviews in this research. In the possible event however, of unexpected outcomes such as the participants becoming upset as a result of the content discussed during the interviews, the researcher would have provided the participants with the opportunity to decide whether or not they wanted to continue with their interview, stop for a break or terminate the process.

At the end of the interviews all participants were debriefed about their participation in the research. In order to support the YP with the debriefing session (where appropriate) they had the option of being provided with visual feelings cards in order to share how they felt about participating in the research. The researcher also ensured that no appointments were booked elsewhere so that if necessary, the time could be taken to support participants by providing them with the opportunity to discuss their experiences of the interviews or to address any concerns that arose in response to being a participant in this research. All of the participants however, expressed that they did not need such support after their interviews.

The participants were also provided with the researcher's contact details and signposted to useful support networks if they had requested additional support after the interviews had taken place (British Psychological Society, 2004).

## Chapter 4 - Analysis

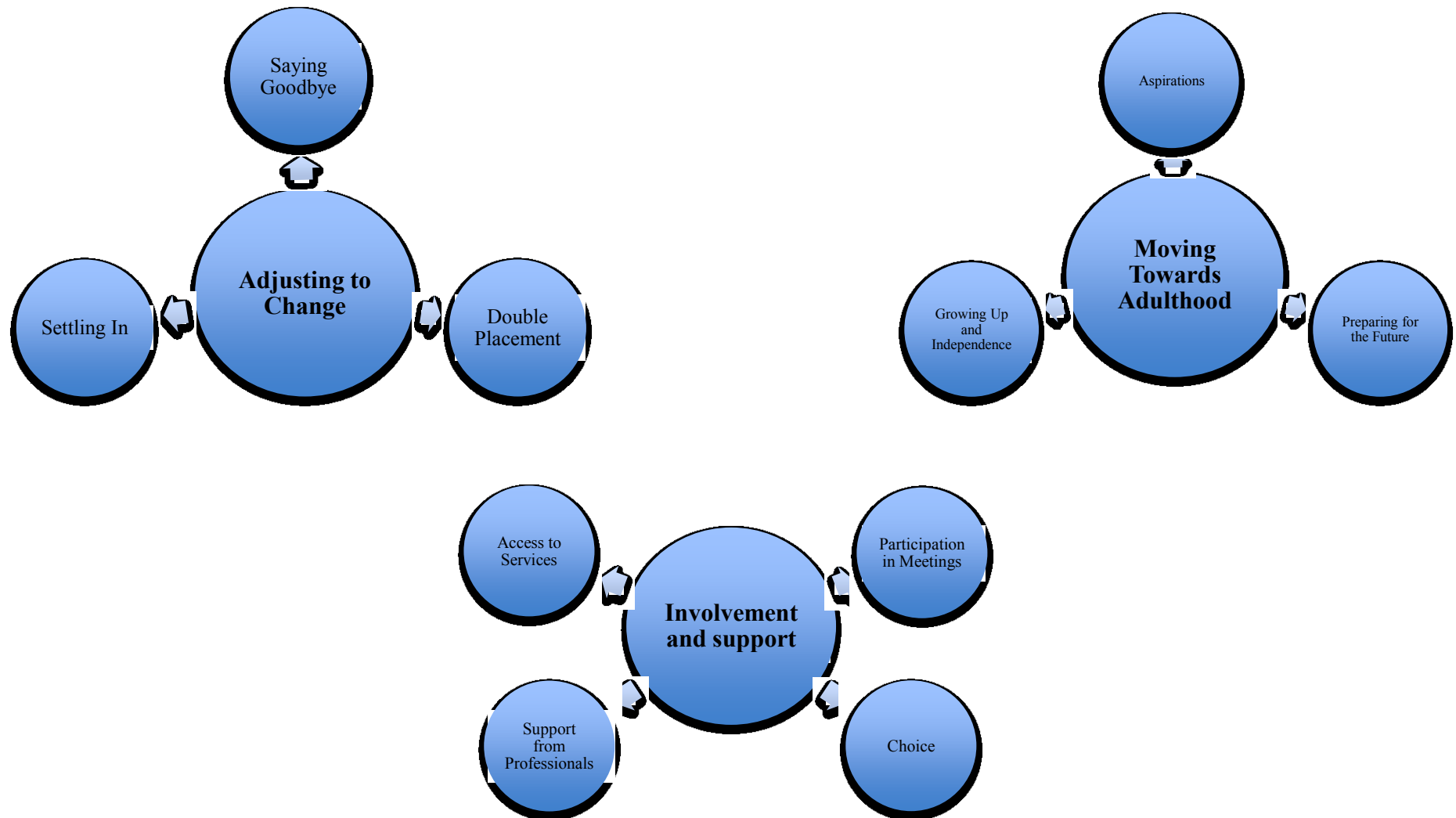
### 4.1 Overview

This chapter aims to provide a detailed and idiographic account of the experiences of three young people (Ricky, Sabina and Sam) who have been identified as having moderate learning difficulties, and their parents (Ms Smith, Mr Nassar and Ms Jones), regarding post-school transition. By using IPA as the method of analysis the emergent themes identified from each of the participants were analysed through the exploration of spatial representations in order to establish how the themes related to each other. They were then tabulated and compared across cases to identify similarities and differences in experiences. The analysis revealed three overarching group super-ordinate themes: (i) Adjusting to Change; (ii) Involvement and Support; and (iii) Moving Towards Adulthood, which are illustrated in Figure 4.1 along with their sub-themes and presented in the corresponding chapters.

As this research adopted a multi-perspective approach towards exploring the relational nature of the experiences of post-school transition for the young people and their parents, the findings are presented as dyads for each superordinate theme. In order to illuminate each of the participants' views within the dyads presented, the interpretation of each person's data was presented separately, making it possible to distinguish between the young people and their parents' views and experiences.

Each thematic section begins by exploring the views and experiences of Ricky and his mother Ms Smith; followed by Sabina and her father Mr Nassar; and lastly Sam and his mother Ms Jones. The chapter consists of verbatim quotes from the interviews as a means of providing transparent evidence. A cross-case analysis is also presented in the chapter 5 in order to explore the commonalities and differences among the cases and how they relate to the wider literature.

Figure 4.1 Diagrammatic Illustrations of the Super-ordinate themes and sub-themes



## 4.2 Theme 1: Adjusting to Change

### 4.2.1 Case one – Ricky and Ms Smith

#### *Saying 'goodbye'*

Ricky spoke enthusiastically about leaving school and moving to college and in response to a question which explored his feelings related to this he expressed the he felt, “*quite good*”, stating, “*I know I’ve got college to go to and I know that it can help me more and more*” (Ricky p2.45-46). Two points could be drawn from this extract: firstly the idea of knowing what will happen once he has left school appears to provide Ricky with a sense of reassurance, thus lowering any anxiety that he may have experienced had he not known what his post-school arrangements were. Secondly, the practical manner in which Ricky talks about his reasons for going to college may also provide him with comfort as he implicitly suggests that the support that he will be receiving from college will help him “*more*” when it replaces the support that has been provided by his school. This way of thinking appears to be a strategy that Ricky has employed to help him with the idea that he will be leaving school but also the sense of loss that he may experience when having to leave the support systems at Willow school such as familiar adults, who he has known for a very long time.

Upon further exploration however, it became apparent that Ricky was not as enthusiastic about leaving school as he had claimed to be, which was evident when he said the following “*Quite sad actually because its like you’re going, you’re moving yeah and you wont see em’, but you can always pop back and say hi*” (Ricky p9.262-264). When asked if he would “*pop back*” Ricky replied “*not for a while*” (Ricky p9.270) and explained, “*if you pop back all the time you won’t get used to being at college*” (Ricky, p9.273-274). Ricky’s response illustrates a thoughtfulness related to the idea that boundaries between the past and the future are helpful during times of transition and are helping him to become accustomed to the fact that he will

no longer be attending school. This fixed view of Ricky's move from school to college was also reflected in his mother's view, which describes how she feels he will adjust to the idea of leaving Willow School:

*“Well to be honest you always know he's gonna have to, even though its, you know its just, he's getting older, and that's it, that's how you look at it, you know the next step” (Ms Smith, p.11.340-343).*

This extract demonstrates that like Ricky, Ms Smith may also be coming to terms with the idea of him leaving school and in turn may also be reassuring herself by expressing that there is no other way of thinking about the situation and that leaving school is an inevitable part of “getting older”. Ms Smith did however express that she believed saying goodbye to Willow School would be an emotional experience for Ricky:

*“I said to him you're be upset tomorrow, you're gonna cry and he went “nah I'm not” and when he come home he went you're right mum I was a bit emotional” (Ms Smith, p9.277-280)*

This extract illustrates that Ms Smith and Ricky appeared to be having open discussions about his feelings towards leaving, which he understood and was able to share with his mother. It also highlights that his more enthusiastic response shared with the researcher about leaving school has another side to it as he is also experiencing more difficult feelings related to saying goodbye to school.

### ***Double placement***

During both interviews with Ricky and Ms Smith it was clear that they valued the opportunity Ricky had to attend college on a part-time basis (three days a week) whilst going to school (two days a week), in order to prepare him for his eventual move to college. For example when encouraged to reflect on his experience during his second interview Ricky said, “*with sixth form your only there for two days and you're in college the rest of the week, and its like*

*your getting used to college” (Ricky, p38.1201-1203).* Ricky’s response demonstrates that the double placement had a functional purpose for him as it helped him to become familiar with college, which in turn supported his transition to it. Like Ricky, Ms Smith also felt that the opportunity to do a double placement was a positive experience for him:

*“I didn't realise that he'd do two days at Willow school I thought it would be straight into college and that was scary, and I think that helped Ricky knowing that he was going back there for two days, cos I think uh he would have been lost without the school to be honest” (Ms Smith, p.11.328-333)*

It appears that not only did the double placement support Ricky with his transition by gradually easing him into college but it also seemed to provide Ms Smith with the reassurance that he would not feel “*lost*” as he had the opportunity to maintain links with his school while preparing to leave.

### ***Settling in***

Both Ricky and Ms Smith felt that he had settled into college well and that his move from school was an overall positive experience. For example, during his second interview Ricky said, “*I’m making new friends and new like, it's a new life basically, and I still see Willow School people’ (Ricky, p33.1042-1043).* The experience of making new friends appears to be an important aspect of being at college for Ricky, and for him signals a new beginning in his life. It is also striking that when talking about individuals from his old school Ricky referred to them as “*Willow School people*”, which may demonstrate that he no longer views himself as being a part of the school and may also indicate that he views it as a part of his ‘old life’. However, the fact that Ricky mentioned seeing people from Willow School may also signal that the opportunity to see familiar faces from his past while being at college may be comforting for him and helping him to settle at a time where a major change has taken place.



During her second interview, Ms Smith explained that Ricky had a positive experience of settling into college:

*“Oh very good I mean, he has no complaints, he seems like he’s making friends, he uh seems to like it .... he seems, well he’s happy with his tutor, I know he’s made a couple more friends so I think overall he’s settled in alright” (Ms Smith, pp34-35.1075-1081)*

Ms Smith particularly focused on the fact that he had made friends at college and viewed the staff members approvingly, therefore demonstrating that these were important factors for her as a parent. She did however go on to talk about Willow school and said, *“I think if he had the choice to stay at home or go and see them he would go and see them so that’s why I think he misses it” (Ms Smith, p42.1333-1335)*, which indicates that although he has settled in at college, she feels that he still holds a strong bond with Willow School. This comment however, contrasts Ricky’s explanation about not going back to Willow School, discussed in the first sub-theme.

#### **4.2.2 Case two – Sabina and Mr Nassar**

##### ***Saying goodbye***

Mr Nassar believes that Sabina’s experience of leaving her school of 12 years was an easy and relatively unemotional experience for her:

*“She don’t have that normal attachment like a lot of people ... do get with uh someone, she doesn’t have that attachment apart from maybe parents that’s it. She doesn’t care whether they come or go or she might say “that’s my friend” but you know, she doesn’t have no, it doesn’t matter how long she know she doesn’t have that attachment you know what I mean” (Mr Nassar, p8.226-232)*

Mr Nassar’s explanation reveals that other than her relationship with her parents, he believes that she has not formed an emotional bond or attachments with people at Willow School because he thinks she is incapable of doing so. His use of the phrase *“normal attachment”* may relate to the idea that Sabina has learning difficulties, which he feels will affect her

ability to understand the significance of leaving school and the emotional impact that this may have. Mr Nassar's comment also indicates that he feels Sabina will not experience the potential negative impact of saying goodbye to her school even though she has attended it for a large part of her life.

Sabina appeared to be positive about leaving school and when asked how she felt, expressed on a number of occasions during both interviews that she was "*Happy*" (Sabina, p5.150) to be leaving. Upon further exploration however, it became clearer why Sabina felt happy about leaving school as she shared, "*I'm going college (laugh) I want a new teachers*" (Sabina, p5.154). Sabina's response regarding having new teachers may possibly illustrate that she is open to the idea of new experiences that leaving school will bring. However, during her second interview the following was revealed:

*Sabina: I miss Willow School*

*R: Why do you miss Willow School?*

*Sabina: I wanna see my friends again*

*R: Your old friends at Willow School?*

*Sabina: Yeah (Sabina, p37.1154-1162)*

Here we see a contrasting view expressed by Sabina, as it appears that her move from school to college may have brought about the realisation of what it actually feels like to be away from Willow School. As this is her first major transition since leaving her nursery 13 years ago, her transition to college appears to have exposed her to a 'new' experience of loss. Sabina's comment also reveals that although she has moved on physically she still has an emotional connection with her friends at the school and is not yet ready to lose those emotional ties, as she wants to see them. This is in direct contrast to her father's view, as it appears that she has in fact formed attachments with people at Willow School.

### ***Double placement***

During the interviews Sabina referred to the fact that she had been seeing friends at both school and college, which she appeared to enjoy. She did not however comment on the opportunity she had to attend school and college at the same time in preparation for her move to college. Mr Nassar on the other hand expressed that he felt Sabina would cope with leaving school and moving to college because of her experience of being on a double placement:

*“I think she’ll be ok, I mean she’s been going last year, she was in college as well so I don’t think she’ll actually will uh (pause) you know will be difficult for her”*  
(Mr Nassar, p9.265-267)

The opportunity to go to college whilst still at school was felt to be beneficial by Mr Nassar as he believes it helped to prepare Sabina for her move from school and to steadily settle her into college, which has made her experience of leaving school less difficult in his opinion.

### ***Settling in***

When Sabina was asked about how college had been going for her the first thing she mentioned was her new relationship:

*R: OK so how you are finding college?*  
*Sabina: I got new boyfriend (laughs) (Sabina, pp19-20.598-600)*

This appeared to be very important information that she wanted to share immediately. Her excitement may possibly suggest that this is an important aspect of her experience of moving to college. Her comment may also reveal that she has settled in and is developing new and positive relationships with others. Mr Nassar also expressed that he felt Sabina was having a positive experience at college when he said, *“she has settled in fine”* (Mr Nassar, p.19.573).

Upon further investigation, he also said:

*“I think they moved them all slowly and she had some people from Willow School going there so its always helpful if you know somebody from the same place”* (Mr Nassar, p26.808-810)

This extract illustrates that Mr Nassar values and sees the importance of the gradual transition from school to college that Sabina experienced. His response also indicates that being able to build and nurture relationships with people from college before moving there also helped Sabina as she could draw on these familiar relationships when she started college.

#### **4.2.3 Case three – Sam and Ms Jones**

##### ***Saying goodbye***

Leaving school appeared to be a relatively positive experience for Sam:

*R: Are you happy or sad to move to college?*

*Sam: Happy*

*R: Happy, why are you happy to go to college?*

*Sam: To see lots of girls at college (Sam, p7.193-199)*

Sam's response demonstrates that he appears to be focusing more on what is to come as a result of leaving school such as being around more girls, as opposed to what he will be leaving behind (e.g. familiar staff members and friends). When asked during his second interview whether or not he missed Willow School he expressed that he did not and explained, "*I still think it in my head*" (Sam, p19.597). Sam's response may be an attempt to explain that he has memories associated with being at Willow School that he feels he can draw on when he is missing it. This may also illustrate that he understands that he will no longer be at the school but will still have thoughts about it, which appears to be good enough for him.

Ms Jones also expressed that Sam did not appear to be negatively affected by the experience of leaving school and moving to college. This was evident when she said, "*No he doesn't miss the school; as much as he enjoyed being there he is fine going to college everyday*" (Ms Jones, p26.813-814). Ms Jones also revealed that the idea of leaving school was not a new

experience for Sam as he had experienced transitioning from one school to another at the end of primary school:

*“We felt it was a big, big step moving away from primary school because he had grown up and was comfortable there, umm but it didn't bother him at all” (Ms Jones, p13.383-383).*

From Ms Jones's observation regarding Sam's lack of response to what she perceived as a major change, it could be interpreted that she felt his move from school to college was easy because he had previous experiences of leaving familiar settings, staff members and friends and in turn is able to adjust to such change with ease. Ms Jones did however voice disappointment around the way in which Sam left Willow School when she stated, *“they sort of just left and that was it really” (Ms Jones, p28.884- 885).* Unlike previous cohorts who had experienced leaving ceremonies and celebrations to clearly mark the ending of their time at school Sam had not experienced such events, which felt somewhat disappointing for her and may indicate that such events are just as important for parents in marking endings as they are for young people.

### ***Double placement***

Although Sam did not specifically refer to his experience of the double placement, he did express the following in response to a question about whether or not things would change after his move to college:

*R: So thinking now about you leaving Willow School, to go to college do you think anything is going to change or do you think things are going to be the same?*

*Sam: Same*

*R: Same? What do you mean?*

*Sam: Same class*

*R: At college? Same class as you were in last year?*

*Sam: Yeah (Sam, p6.162-174)*

Sam's response may reflect the influence of his prior experience of being at college and working with the tutors whilst still at school and would explain why he sees his new course at college as a continuation of his previous experience. However, it could also be interpreted that Sam's response reflects a defense he is putting up against the idea that things will change when he moves. Ms Jones appeared to view Sam's placement positively and as a supportive experience, which he benefitted from:

*"He's just happy there, he's comfortable there, he knows his way around and likes the independence... he wants you to know him before he'll settle down and focus, so he's already done that so hopefully he'll go straight into the learning" (Ms Jones, p23.718-723)*

This passage highlights that she views Sam's move to college as positive and also reveals that the opportunity to attend college and school at the same time enabled him to develop his independence and establish himself amongst the staff and his peers at college, which she feels has supported his social and emotional wellbeing and him settling in to college life.

### ***Settling in***

When encouraged to talk about how he felt about being at college, Sam said, "love it" (Sam, p24.757). Although he does not use many words to explain himself, his choice of words succinctly convey his positive feelings towards moving to college. During Ms Jones's second interview her views also revealed that she felt he had adjusted well to leaving school and only attending college:

*"He's happy to go ... he doesn't moan that his friend is not in his class or his group or anything like that so, he still sees him at break" (Ms Jones, p34.1069-1072)*

It is evident that Ms Jones feels that he has settled in well, but what is also highlighted is the attention that she places on his friendship, which appears to be important to her and an indicator of whether or not he is getting on well at college. Her focus on his friendships could

however be her way of interpreting whether he has settled at college or not, which may also serve to reassure her that he is coping well at college.

### **4.3 Theme 2: Involvement and Support**

#### **4.3.1 Case one – Ricky and Ms Smith**

##### *Participation in meetings*

During both of their interviews, Ricky and Ms Smith voiced that they felt they were provided with the opportunity to participate in meetings related to his move to college and to contribute to the process. For example, Ricky expressed that he felt he was involved when he said, “*they did listen because what I’m on now, the course I’m on is helping me*” (Ricky, p32.1012-1013). As Ricky will be enrolled on a college course that he feels will support him in working towards his goal of eventually studying cookery, he has interpreted this as others listening to him and taking his views into account during the meetings he has been a part of. Ms Smith also felt that she had the opportunity to participate in the meetings she attended and explained that she was given the opportunity to express her views throughout the process:

*I was always involved, I mean everything ... if I weren’t happy with him doing it I would have put my feelings across and they would have had to listen so and I think they would have so, uh yeah I feel that we were both involved (Ms Smith, p18.546-553)*

Ms Smith uses words such as ‘*involved*’ and ‘*everything*’, which both evoke just how strongly she feels about her participation in the process. Her response also indicates that she felt confident to oppose any decisions made that she did not agree with and that the professionals present would have taken on such concerns. That said, Ms Smith also questions the true impact that her involvement actually has when she said, “*I was always asked, but then I don’t know if they were [laugh] but I felt they were followed up*” (Ms Smith, p19.575-577).

Although she did not complete her sentence, her tone at this point in the interview changed and became somewhat sarcastic as she began to question whether or not her views during the meetings were really considered. She does however, quickly refrain from doing so and changes the direction of the conversation back to a more positive recollection of her experience. Her reason for doing so could be related to the fact that throughout her interviews, she spoke highly of Willow School and Ricky's experiences there and as a result does not want to associate any negative comments with it or tarnish the positive memories that she as a parent has of the school.

### ***Choice***

Ricky appeared to be positive about being able to make his own choices related to his post-school arrangements. For example:

*R: Did your school involve you or did they make all of the decisions?*

*Ricky: They gave you a choice (Ricky, p49.1552-1555)*

Ricky's response indicates that believes his school provided him with choices as he prepared to move on to college, which is congruent with the views he expressed regarding feeling listened by the adults around him during meetings and when making decisions. Ms Smith's opinion regarding available choices for Ricky's post-school arrangements however was somewhat different as she expressed:

*"He didn't have many options, well he didn't have any options really it was either go to college or what would become of him?" (Ms Smith, p34.1064-1067)*

Although Ms Smith previously talked about feeling as though both she and Ricky were able to agree or disagree with post-school plans proposed by the school and college staff, this extract clearly illustrates her annoyance at the inequality she feels he has experienced due to the lack of post-school choices available. Her response also evokes strong feelings of



frustration during the transition process around Ricky's options being restricted to either what was available and offered to him or nothing. Ms Smith also expressed that 'typically developing' individuals have more opportunities in comparison to those with learning difficulties:

*"I was told everything, but I do think we got more opportunities, we've got the option of going to college, going to school, staying on at school, getting a job, they haven't had any, Ricky hasn't had any what I can tell so I do feel uh let down a bit if I'm honest"* (Ms Smith, pp33-34.1048-1053)

Ms Smith's comment conveys that she feels the school provided her with a lot of information during the process and that she does not place any blame with them but is frustrated with wider society, and the inequality that exists, which has resulted in limited opportunities for young people and adults with learning difficulties.

### ***Support from professionals***

Both Ricky and his mother felt supported by professionals, however this was expressed in different ways. For example, when exploring this topic with Ricky the following was said:

*R: OK so when you had the conversations about what you want to do when you leave school do you think people listened to you or not?*

*Ricky: no they did listen*

*R: Who listened to you?*

*Ricky: practically everyone*

*R: yeah, who did?*

*Ricky: mum, head teacher, tutor (Ricky, pp22-23.696-708)*

As Ricky felt listened to by a number of adults this for him may equate to being supported by others with his move to college. This extract also reveals that he may have also felt as though he was actively involved during the process. In comparison however, Ms Smith appeared to judge the level of support provided by professionals according to the observable input they had during the process. For example, when discussing the involvement of external professionals at meetings she said the following:

*“There was a Connexions lady that used to come to the reviews, uh ... she just sat there writing stuff. I didn't really have anything to do with her” (Ms Smith, p17.523-529)*

However, when referring to professionals such as Ricky's teachers, tutors and hearing specialists, it could be interpreted that she viewed their impact as more meaningful, which is evident when she said, *“we felt that they were learning experts so we listened to them and it did sound good to be honest” (Ms Smith, p22.687-689)*. Ms Smith appears to trust the expertise of school and college staff and in turn is comfortable with relinquishing the responsibility of deciding what his post-school arrangements will be as she feels that they are in a position to advise her.

### ***Access to services***

During his first interview Ricky talked about his experience of meeting with a Connexions advisor in Year 9 to talk about what he would like to do in the future and commented that he would have preferred to have this support in Year 11:

*R: Why do you wish that you had it in Year 11 and not just Year 9?*

*Ricky: Because I had different things, like I wanted to be a car mechanic in Year 9 but in Year 11 I changed the thing (Ricky, p32.984-987)*

Although Ricky did have access to the service his reply indicates that the timing of the support was felt to be too early and so the information he received during Year 9 did not account for the fact that he changed his career ambitions. Ricky's response also indicates that as he has aged his ideas about the future have changed and may be due to changes in his interests or because his ideas are now more realistic and assessed according to his actual abilities. Ms Smith on the other hand explicitly expressed her dissatisfaction about the services available for Ricky upon leaving school:

*“I still don't see why you have to pay and do everything to get on to have a life cos that's all it really boils down to and it could all change by the time Ricky's left college” (Ms Smith, p45.1412-1415)*

Ms Smith's comment demonstrates that her views of the services currently available are out of reach and restricted to those who can pay for them. It is also evident that his transition to college may have also triggered thoughts about his next transition from college to adulthood, which it is evident she is already beginning to worry about, possibly because she has no information regarding what potential plans could look like for Ricky.

#### **4.3.2 Case two – Sabina and Mr Nassar**

##### ***Participation in meetings***

There were differing views regarding participation in meetings for example, Sabina initially reported that she had been to meetings but upon further exploration, she said she had not been to any but that her father had attended them. When asked why this was the case she said, *“because I'm lazy” (Sabina, p34.1077)*. The manner in which Sabina describes herself as *“lazy”* might indicate that she believes her point of view at meetings may not be as important as her father's view or that she does not see or understand the value of being able to share her views regarding what she would like to do when she leaves school. When exploring Mr Nassar's participation in meetings he said the following:

*“They know the children from the school and when we had the last meeting ... all the experts, the school teacher, the County Council, uh I think social services were there and ... as a group, we were sitting there so I think that's when they decided that the person who assess what child will be able to do in ... college” (Mr Nassar, p17.511-518)*

Although he may have been physically present at the meetings, Mr Nassar's comment reveals that he appeared to take on a passive role and viewed the professionals as ‘all-knowing’ experts who were best placed to think about and decide what would happen next for his

daughter. His use of the words “*they decided*” further illustrates his perception of their role and may also explain the possible lack of involvement and decision-making on his part. A further explanation for Mr Nassar’s passivity during meetings may also stem from the idea that he may view meetings as a forum where he as a parent is provided with information and advice and so does not see his role as contributory to the process.

### ***Choice***

Sabina and her father appeared to have had similar experiences around the lack of choice provided during the process however what was poignant was the way in which they viewed this. For example, when talking about her wish to fix cars in the future, the following was shared:

*R: Fixing cars? You want to be a mechanic?*

*Sabina: [nods head yes]*

*R: So why don't you fix cars at college?*

*Sabina: They won't get me job there*

*R: They wont?*

*Sabina: get me job*

*R: Who won't let you get a job?*

*Sabina: Mrs Bronze (Sabina, p11.332-346)*

Sabina’s response illustrates that she feels her wish to pursue this career pathway at college is being blocked by her teachers at school. It also demonstrates that she does not understand or that it might not have been explained to her why she would not be doing the mechanics course, which appears to frustrate her. When the topic of choice was explored with Mr Nassar however, his response clearly conveyed that he was not presented with a range of post-school options for either himself or his daughter to choose from, but had an understanding and accepting attitude towards this. For example he said, “*the school chose it for her yeah because obviously they know*” (Mr Nassar, p14.413-414). Again it is evident that Mr Nassar values the

idea that professionals are experts and are therefore capable of making the right decisions based on their knowledge of Sabina's needs. This is further reinforced when he said:

*"I mean you wouldn't know any different you know if it was a normal child then you say no, no I insist my child do computing or I want my child to go in a medicine"*  
(Mr Nassar, pp17-18.536-539)

Again it emerges that he holds the views of professionals in high esteem however this appears to be the case because he believes he lacks the appropriate knowledge needed to think about Sabina's needs because of her learning difficulties. This extract may also indicate that he believes that if Sabina were a "normal child" he would have been able to think about post-school provision options for her and share them with others. This view may reflect an underlying feeling of loss related to him not being able to experience the feeling of exploring more traditional and academic post-school routes of study, for Sabina, which has been triggered by the initiation of her post-school planning.

### ***Support from professionals***

Sabina focused on support from adults immediately around her such as her mother and teachers at school, however her departure from school appeared to change her attitude towards receiving help from others. For example, when exploring the support she receives at college the following was said:

*R: OK so the last time we met with each other you told me that the teachers help you at school, who helps you at college now?*

*Sabina: No my own*

*R: You do it on your own?*

*Sabina: Yeah (Sabina, p24.749-757)*

Since leaving school it is apparent that Sabina has adopted a newfound sense of independence, which is illustrated in her response towards receiving support. This change

may have arisen in response to her perception that leaving school equates to being older and more independent.

As mentioned in the previous sub-theme, Mr Nassar referred to the fact that school and college staff provided him with support related to thinking about Sabina's future at college, however when he attempted to get support from professionals regarding extra-curricular activities for Sabina to take part in on her day off from college he said the following:

*"I rang the school they go oh no no ring up the Connexions, so I rang the Connexions up and Connexions goes no that's not our that's not something we do, its down to the social services to give the hours again and they go oh we'll talk to the social services, but nothing I've never heard from them. I was going back and forward and I never heard from them so I just gave up" (Mr Nassar, p10.286-293)*

Mr Nassar's frustration about being passed from agency to agency with no real support is evident in his account and also illustrates that he strongly depends on professionals for support with meeting his daughter's needs. This could be said to further demonstrate his sense of passivity or may demonstrate that he lacks confidence in his own ability to affect change for his daughter without the external support of professionals.

### ***Access to services***

This was not a salient sub-theme for Sabina but was mentioned by Mr Nassar on a number of occasions as he frequently referred to his dissatisfaction regarding the lack of support he felt he was provided with when attempting to locate extra-curricular activities for Sabina. When asked whether or not he felt that getting support from agencies had always been as difficult as he described Mr Nassar said:

*"I didn't think that they did much really, when we asked for something you know its like "we'll do it" but then it wasn't like I felt they did something at all, you know" (Mr Nassar, p11.318-321)*

The feeling that services have never really supported Sabina is in stark contrast to the comments made by Mr Nassar regarding professionals taking on the role of assessing and deciding what they felt was best for her, which appeared to be something that he valued. However, as he continues to voice his dissatisfaction regarding the lack of support that he felt they had received he narrows his focus down and levels his frustration towards social services and social workers:

*“I mean this social services I spoke to them but they said they’d look into it and nothing happens and then every time I get one it’s a different one, and I’m thinking gosh how many social services I have (laugh)” (Mr Nassar, p11.341-344)*

His attempts to seek support from Sabina’s social workers regarding her post-school extra-curricular arrangements have been unproductive and may serve as an indication that the support once received under children’s services may perhaps be starting to dissipate as Sabina moves towards adulthood.

#### **4.3.3 Case three – Sam and Ms Jones**

##### ***Participation in meetings***

Sam and Ms Jones both shared that they attended meetings related to him moving to college however there appeared to be clear differences in the ways in which each of them participated in them. For example Ms Jones said the following:

*“We had meetings with the Deputy head at the school who explained the course that they would be running jointly uh and the college provided information as well and all through the transition ... I had a couple of phone calls through the school to see how he was getting on because their open evening were so much earlier that I couldn’t get to them but the lady who was running it was very helpful” (Ms Jones, p29.897-906)*

Ms Jones’s comment indicates that she feels positive about her experience and believes that both the school and college staff members were generally forthcoming when sharing information about Sam’s transition. She also appreciated being able to communicate with the

school and college by telephone as it provided her with the opportunity to share her views when unable to attend planned meetings. When talking about Sam's involvement in meetings Ms Jones said, "*when we had meetings as a group yes they asked him questions and what he wanted to do as well*" (Ms Jones, p42.1326-1327), which demonstrates that she feels his views were sought and that he was viewed as an active participant during the meetings.

When discussing his participation in meetings, Sam revealed that he had been to meetings at a different college when thinking about with his parents where he would be going after leaving school. For example, Sam said the following:

*R: So when you were at Willow School did you have any meetings where mum and dad came into school to talk to adults about your learning, do you remember going to any of these meetings?*

*Sam: yep 'B' College (Sam, p14.437-442)*

Although the question originally aimed to explore his participation in meetings at school, the meeting at 'B' college appears to have been a memorable event for Sam, which may indicate that he played an actively role during it.

### ***Choice***

During Sam's interview his mother mentioned that he had the option of going to 'A' College or 'B' College and when this was further explored with Sam he said "*I chose 'A' College, I can walk*" (Sam, p15.447). This comment reveals that Sam felt he was able to make a choice about the college he would be going to and that the basis for his choice was linked to the idea that he would be able to go to college on his own and exercise increased independence. This was explored further after he had moved to college during his second interview:

*R: OK so now that you are at 'A' College are you happy with your choice?*

*Sam: Love it*

*R: Why do you love it?*

*Sam: I like walking (Sam, pp24-25.754-761)*



Sam expressed positive feelings towards being at 'A' College, which appears to be largely influenced by the fact that he can walk to it on his own and illustrates that he embraces the independence associated with leaving school and going to college. Sam's choice however, may also be influenced by the idea that he may not have wanted to lose the familiarity of 'A' College as he has experienced being there during his double placement and in turn could have played a large role in him wanting to go back. Ms Jones also expressed that Sam was given the opportunity to make a choice about what college he wanted to go to. She said:

*"We gave him the choice of where he would prefer to stay cos he does know people at 'B' College as well ... he wanted to stay at 'A' College because I think he feels grown up and independent going there"* (Ms Jones, p11.318-322)

This extract illustrates that Sam's preference was important to his parents and that they believed there were options available for him to choose from and in turn gave him the opportunity to do so. Ms Jones's response also indicates that because Sam had friends at both colleges his choice of either would have been fine by her and further highlights the importance that Ms Jones places on him being around familiar peers when at college. However, although she gave Sam a choice, it could also be interpreted that she wanted him to continue at 'A' College because in her comment she said *"We gave him the choice of where he would prefer to stay"*, and her use of the word *stay* instead of *go* may have implicitly signaled her preference for the college as his post-school provision.

### ***Support from professionals***

When exploring Sam and Ms Jones's experience of receiving support from professionals while preparing him for his move to college both parties reported that they had received help. For example a discussion with Sam revealed the following:

*R: Did anyone at school talk to you about growing up and moving to college?*  
*Sam: (silence)*  
*Mum: Luke or Mrs Copper?*

*Sam: Yeah*

*R: Who did?*

*Sam: Luke (Sam, p9.255-266)*

With support from his mother to think about this, Sam agreed that his music teacher talked to him about the future. However the fact that this was not memorable for Sam might suggest that he had forgotten the occurrence of such input, or that such support was not striking for him. When exploring Ms Jones's views regarding Sam's double placement her response provided some insight into her experience of receiving support from professionals. For example, when talking about a particular member of staff at the college she said the following:

*"She was always phoning us and telling us how he was getting on ... we had meetings with Charlotte as well there where we'd discuss his progress quite often"*  
*(Ms Jones, p42.1308-1313)*

It is evident that her experience has been positive as support from staff at the college was felt to be frequent, flexible and informative, which allowed her to keep up to date with her son's progress and play an active role in getting him ready for his eventual move to college. Ms Jones also referred to the involvement of professionals from external agencies when she said, *"The Youth Connexions officer did come to one of the meetings but I felt I got more information from the school"* (Ms Jones, p15.457-458). Her response indicates that although this professional was present she felt that he or she did not contribute to the meeting and instead felt that she received more support from the school and college staff when preparing her son for his post-school transition.

### ***Access to services***

This is an area that Sam did not focus on during his interviews, Ms Jones however did touch on this on a few occasions when making references to his health needs (hearing) and extra-

curricular activities. For example, when talking about Sam's move from child to adult services Ms Jones said the following:

*"I know when he's 19 we can't go to the Tally Centre to get his hearing aids anymore I know that. Speech and Language have already written to say that he will be receiving some sort of speech and language therapy at the college, umm how that fits in with the course I don't know but we're going to make an appointment to enroll so I'll find out a bit more then" (Ms Jones, p24.735-741)*

It is evident from her response that she is aware of the support that Sam will receive when he moves onto college and with the information Ms Jones does not have she has an idea about where to go in order to find answers, therefore displaying a proactive attitude and exercising her right as a parent to seek out information related to her son's future. Her expectations regarding the continuation of support from services for Sam is also illustrated in the following extract where Ms Jones talks about securing the funding for Sam's extra-curricular activities:

*"I've got to get in touch with Connexions and social services and things like that for the funding for it, but at the moment we're going to fund it to get it going so that we don't have to wait" (Ms Jones, p27.835-838)*

Although Sam has moved to college, Ms Jones is still positive about the idea of receiving support from the Local Authority when she contacts them, which is demonstrated in her willingness to pay for Sam's activities in advance as she is confident that they will reimburse the out of pocket expenses. Such optimism may indicate that she has historically had positive experiences accessing services and so feels positive that it will continue as Sam moves to adult services.

## 4.4 Theme 3: Moving Towards Adulthood

### 4.4.1 Case one – Ricky and Ms Smith

#### *Aspirations*

Both Ricky and his mother hold similar views about what his aspirations for the future are. For example during her first interview, Ms Smith said, *“He loves cooking ... that's one of the things that he does wanna do really on the next stages of college and that”* (Ms Smith, p1.8-10). Her response is linked to his passion for cookery and her awareness that this is something he would like to pursue after he has left school. This was also reinforced when she said, *“he’s got it in him that he knows what he wants to do so I would just encourage that”* (Ms Smith, p11.345-346). It is clear that Ms Smith feels that Ricky has the potential to achieve the goals that he has set himself, which she will support. When talking to Ricky about what he would like to do when he leaves school he said:

*“I’m gonna do a two years course and then I’m gonna try and do apprenticeship and then eventually when that’s up I’m gonna look for a job in cookery.”* (Ricky, p27.837-839)

Ricky’s response illustrates two points: firstly, that his mother has a good understanding of the goals he would like to pursue in the future as their views align with each other; and secondly, that he has spent time thinking about his future and has a clear image in his mind of what it will look like and a plan for how he will go about achieving it, which he is able to communicate to others clearly. When exploring why Ricky would be study life skills at college instead of cookery he said, *“I think I need to do, like carry on doing like maths and that”* (Ricky, p14.428-429), and also said, *“cos I’m not ready”* (Ricky, p14.434). Ricky’s appraisal of his current skills set and his ability to identify the support he requires going forwards demonstrates that he has adopted a rather realistic approach of working towards achieving the goal that he has set himself.

### ***Preparing for the future***

Discussions with Ricky and Ms Smith revealed that this was a topic that had been thought about and explored by them in detail. For example when talking to Ricky about whether or not he believed his school helped to get him ready to move on to college he said *“they did do things like they uh helped us with our money and all that and make sure that you’re independent like living”* (Ricky, pp44-45. 1398-1400). Ricky’s focus on the development of practical life skills such as money management and independent living skills illustrates that they are proficiencies that he recognises are necessary for the future. Ricky’s attention placed on such skills may also indicate that becoming more independent is important to him. Like Ricky, Ms Smith also referred to life skills that she believed Ricky needed in order to develop his independence as he leaves school and moves towards adulthood. When talking about how his Life Skills course will prepare him for the future she expressed the following:

*“It’s teaching him how to uh look after himself and uh be independent and I suppose if something did happen to me he could go into accommodation”* (Ms Smith, p44.1385-1388)

It appears that Ms Smith wants Ricky to be a self-sufficient individual and that the advent of his transition from school has triggered thoughts about how he will cope as an adult. Her description of the course also indicates that she sees it as a solution in helping Ricky to achieve independence someday, which seems to provide her with an ‘emotional safety blanket’ and contains her anxiety related to her son’s future, which is clearly a concern for her as she articulates worries about Ricky’s wellbeing when she is no longer around to support him.

### ***Growing up and Independence***

The idea of growing up, independence and what that means for Ricky and his mother differed significantly. For example, when talking about whether or not Ricky felt he was ready to

move to college he responded by saying:

*“The times up really and plus your 17 and your like, I’m 17 and I’m nearly like 18 in January and its like you’re too grown up for school now and you need to go to college to do something with your life” (Ricky, p25.776-779)*

It is evident that Ricky has adopted a social view of adulthood, which suggests that being 18 years old results in increased independence and that being grown up and continued education or participation in other activities, is a part of transition. When asked what being older meant to him the following was said:

*Ricky: ... you get more like more responsibilities*

*R: OK what kinds of responsibilities?*

*Ricky: like going out to town on your own (Ricky, p12.358-363)*

The idea of reduced supervision and being able to go out alone appear to be important aspects of growing up for Ricky, and is also demonstrated when he said, *“live on my own and just like be independent” (Ricky, p27.830-831)*. His response illustrates that he hopes to leave home and become an independent young man in the future. In contrast however, Ms Smith did not appear to feel the same way as Ricky about growing up. For example, she said, *“he’s 17 but he’s probably not 17 he’s probably 9 or 10 in mind” (Ms Smith, p29.922-923)*. Although she has great expectations for her son (expressed in the previous sub-theme) this comment illustrates that she continues to view him as a child, which appears to be informed by her view of his cognitive ability. This view was reinforced when she also said, *“I can’t see him ever being without me to be honest” (Ms Smith, p30.934-935)*. This comment reflects Ms Smith’s feeling that Ricky needs a lot support and as he gets older, this will not change and he will always be dependent on her for support. Her comment may also reflect the fact that she has spent a lot of time looking after her son due to his needs and in turn experiences the idea of him growing up and becoming more independent as difficult and a huge change to cope with. This comment is also in direct contrast to the views she expressed regarding her wish for his increased independence, which may indicate some anxiety that she is experiencing as a result

of thinking about it him growing up.

Ms Smith's view of Ricky's independence appeared to shift however, when Ricky moved to college as she shared that he began to use public transport everyday to get to and from college independently. When talking about his travel experiences she also explained, "*he'll go to town and do things on his own and I let him because he's coming up to 18 soon so I'm letting him have that independence*" (Ms Smith, p39.1222-1225). Her focus on his age and the fact that he will be 18 years old soon appears to have influenced her decision to allow him to be more independent. In addition her use of language such as, "*I let him*" also demonstrates that she is beginning to recognise that Ricky is not as dependent as she once thought he was.

#### **4.4.2 Case two – Sabina and Mr Nassar**

##### ***Aspirations***

When exploring if there was anything else that Sabina would like to do when she is older, in addition to being a mechanic she expressed "*I wanna Doctors when I go older*" (Sabina, p12.379). As the interview progressed Sabina also said "*I'm older I'm gonna ambulance when I got older*" (Sabina, p13.388). Such comments illustrate that she has thought about different ideas and is able to voice her views about what she would like to do in the future. In addition to her vocational aspirations, Sabina also said, "*I'm gonna move out, get money, get car*" (Sabina, p31.952), which signals that as she gets older she believes she will become more independent in the different areas mentioned.

In contrast however, Mr Nassar appears to have 'come to terms' with the idea that the aspirations that some parents may have for their 'typically developing' children may be unrealistic for him to have for Sabina. For example he said:

*“You know uh as any parents uh who doesn't want their child to be normal, but unfortunately some of us cant have it. Who doesn't want their child to go to a university get a degree? Or get a, get a Masters” (Mr Nassar, pp2-3.58-61)*

It is clear that academic success is important to Mr Nassar and Sabina's transition from formal to further education appears to have prompted the realisation that she may never be able to follow the post-school pathways that he may have hoped for and in turn is one of the 'unfortunate' parents he refers to. Mr Nassar's comment may also demonstrate that he is experiencing loss related to not having a "normal" child or with being able to experience such events as a parent, but appears to have accepted this, which is illustrated when he said, "unfortunately some of us cant have it".

### ***Preparing for the future***

When exploring whether or not Sabina had the opportunity to talk to anyone at school about what she would like to do when she is older, she initially said no and then said, "Me doing life skills, me doing cookering my friends there. Me making cookering" (Sabina, pp31-32.983-984). This comment indicates that she is aware of what she will be studying at college, however she did not at any point during her interview make a connection between her new life skills course at college and her future. This may reflect the fact that she does not see the two as being linked in anyway. Mr Nassar on the other hand spoke rationally about the life skills course and they way in, which he felt it would support her for the future. For example, he said:

*“She needs life skills so she knows how, I think its mostly to do how to look after yourself, how to cook, how to do you know day to day, how to do shopping” (Mr Nassar, pg18.551-553)*

It appears that alongside teachers and other professionals, Mr Nassar also recognises the benefits of her moving on to college to study life skills. He did however voice disappointment in the college's lack of knowledge regarding the status of the course once Sabina completes



her first year as they are unsure whether or not funding from the Local Authority will be available for her to continue on to Year 2 of the course. When talking about this it was evident that he felt it was unfair and said:

*“You wouldn't do that to or say that to a person or normal kid you know you wouldn't say after two years well I dunno if I've got the money to give you third year” (Mr Nassar, p23.712-715).*

Mr Nassar implicitly proposes an interesting differentiation between being a ‘*person*’ or ‘*normal*’ and his daughter and her unique needs, which may signal that the transition to college has triggered feelings for him that have amplified his thoughts about Sabina being different because of her learning needs. It also illustrates that he is upset about the perceived inequality that he feels Sabina is experiencing, which is highlighted in his suggestion that if she had been a ‘typically developing’ young person she would have been treated more fairly and that the college would have been in a position to be more clear about her future on the course.

### ***Growing up and Independence***

Sabina and her father viewed the idea of her growing up in different ways. For example, during a discussion about what she would like to do when she is older Sabina expressed the wish to move out of her family home and, “*get a house for myself*” (Sabina, p15.463), which would make her happy. When this was further explored the following was discussed:

*R: Why does it make you happy?*

*Sabina: My friends coming round*

*R: So your friends can come and see you?*

*Sabina: Yeah my house*

*R: And what will you do when they come to see you?*

*Sabina: Go down town, sleepover and my boyfriend allowed to sleep over. (Sabina, pp15-16.474-484)*

It is clear that increased autonomy is something that Sabina values and feels she will have

more of it if she moves into her own accommodation. It also appears that she has a strong desire to be independent and feels that a part of this also involves being unsupervised in her own space, while friends and her boyfriend spend time with her. This may also indicate that she is beginning to think of such relationships in a more mature way. Mr Nassar also talked about his view of Sabina as a young person and voiced his concerns related to her vulnerability. For example he said:

*“If you look outside she’s all grown up, in her mind she is like a child and when I spoke to doctor she even said her brain is like a 7, 8, 9 years old child, its never actually matured although it might get better” (Mr Nassar, p5.135-138)*

Mr Nassar’s view of Sabina’s ‘physical growth versus her age-related abilities’ suggests that he feels that they are incongruent, as her brain has not yet “matured”. The implicit reference made regarding her cognitive skills illustrates that he has employed a medical model in order to think about Sabina’s needs. This approach also appears to provide him with some hope that her learning needs may improve, as she gets older. Mr Nassar then moved on to discuss his fear regarding her safety and potential vulnerability because of her learning needs, when in the company of individuals from the opposite sex:

*“If someone say, somebody sitting there said something to Sabina, gave her a compliment she wouldn't know the difference. That's why we always insist that she’s with the escort when she is going with a male to college” (Mr Nassar, p15.462-466)*

Although Sabina is growing up Mr Nassar’s safeguarding concerns for his her continue to persist, which illustrates that he does not see her as being independent and able to look after her self, and is also reflected in the fact that he continues to request adult supervision for her to ensure that she is safe when in situations that he perceives may potentially be unsafe (e.g. when alone with a man).

#### **4.4.3 Case three – Sam and Ms Jones**

##### ***Aspirations***

When exploring what Sam would like to do when he is older, he reported, “*be a castle hire*” (Sam, p13.389), which his mother clarified by explaining that he meant “*Bouncy castle hire*” (in Sam, p13.391). This idea appeared to be important to Sam as he maintained that this is his career choice during his second interview and may indicate that he has given some thought to this and is serious about it. His comment also revealed that he is able to think about his future and voice his aspirations related to it. In contrast however, when talking about activities that Sam enjoyed taking part in at Willow School Ms Jones said that Sam enjoyed, “*doing the gardening*” (Ms Jones, p7.212), and explained that as a result she was, “*trying to encourage the gardening*” (Ms Jones, p7.216). Their difference in views illustrates that Sam and his mother have different views about his future career choices, which for Sam appears to be based on his interest in bouncy castles, while for Ms Jones appears to be based on her observations of his success with gardening in the past, which for her is a realistic goal that she hopes he will pursue and possibly make a career of.

##### ***Preparing for the future***

When exploring whether or not she believed staff members from Willow School had listened to Sam’s aspirations, Ms Jones responded by saying, “*I think it was general life skills which I think are more important for Sam particularly, so I think they were the focus point on what he did next*” (Ms Jones, p20.616-618). By placing less attention on Sam’s wishes and placing more emphasis what she believes is necessary, which is developing his life skills it is apparent that this overrides Sam’s views.

Ms Jones demonstrates a strong desire in wanting to develop Sam's employability skills for the future, which conveys that she wants him to be independent in this area of life. This is also evident when she said, "*I'm hoping that he'll continue in something that we find him work experience wise*" (Ms Jones, p21.641-643), and during her second interview when she reveals that she has managed to secure an extra-curricular work experience opportunity for Sam at a charitable organization, doing gardening on his days off from college. This further demonstrates her strong interest in ensuring that he has the opportunity to develop the necessary skills needed to find a job and may also suggest that for her having a job symbolises independence and will ensure that he is included and a member of society.

### ***Growing up and Independence***

When encouraged to talk about his experience of settling into college, Sam's brief explanation revealed that he enjoys walking to college on his own. When encouraged to explain why this was the case the following was discussed:

*Sam: Cos I'm old enough*

*R: And you think you should walk on your own because you're old enough?*

*Sam: Cos I'm older and cool (Sam, p25.774-779)*

It is evident that since leaving school and moving to college Sam believes that he is more independent and no longer in need of adult supervision when walking to college. His comment also suggests that he feels somewhat proud about the fact that he is growing up and beginning to do things on his own. When exploring this with Ms Jones she also appeared to be open to Sam's requests to walk to school on his own, which is evident when she said "*he kept saying I wanna walk, I wanna walk so there were a couple of days he walked*" (Ms Jones, p36.1136-1137). Ms Jones's agreement to allow Sam to walk to college indicates that she feels he is growing up and is ready to develop independence in areas such as travel.

Although Ms Jones appeared to be positive about her son walking to school independently the discussion with her during the second interview revealed that she did not feel as positive when thinking about Sam using public transport on his own, for example, she said *“the bus scares me a bit because its not just his ability its his vulnerability really if he went on his own”* (Ms Jones, p37.1159-1160). Her response indicates that it may not be the journey that she feels he cannot cope with but rather the actions of others in society and the negative impact that they could have on him, which worries her and in turn influenced her decision to hold off on training him on how to use the bus. However, when talking about her long-term hopes for Sam she expressed that she hopes:

*“He’ll be partially at least independent, if he had a little place of his own that he kept tidy, a job that he focused on and enjoyed”* (Ms Jones, p20.628-630)

Despite her reservations regarding independent travel on buses, Ms Jones wants Sam to be somewhat self-sufficient and able to look after himself in his own accommodation, which is a huge step that appears to have been prompted by the event of his move from Willow School to college.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **5.1 Overview**

This chapter opens with a summary of the study's findings along with a cross-case analysis of the themes for the participants, highlighting convergence and divergence in the data (Smith, 2004). In order to explore '*the uniqueness*' and '*the particularity*' of the experiences of the young people and their parents in relation to the phenomenon of post-school transition, (van Manen & Adams, 2010, p.449), a discussion of the study's findings in relation to the two original research questions whilst simultaneously relating the findings to theoretical explanations and previous literature will be presented. Implications and the significance of the findings for stakeholders such as young people with learning difficulties; parents and carers; schools and Educational Psychologists will also be considered and ideas regarding further research will be signposted. A critical evaluation of the methodological approach adopted and possible ethical issues present will also be explored.

### **5.2 The Data**

As the interviews with the participants produced a huge amount of data, a decision had to be made regarding which aspects to focus on and discuss, as it was not possible to analyse every aspect of the participants' accounts shared. The analysis therefore consisted of accounts selected by the researcher, which attempted as much as possible to be representative of the data provided by the participants. It is acknowledged however, given the interpretative nature of IPA along with the empathetic hermeneutics and critical approach employed in this study, there might have been an element of subjectivity that influenced the way in which the researcher selected and highlighted aspects of the data produced. It is also recognised that the findings presented in the analysis chapter may produce different interpretations by readers of

this thesis and so the research presented does not aim to be the final say on the experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties and their parents' experiences of post-school transition (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

### **5.3 Summary of Findings and Existing Research**

The Study aimed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties and their parents during their post-school transition. Following a review of the literature and guiding policies two main research questions were developed and explored through semi-structured interviews with three young people and their parents (one parent per a young person):

- **RQ1:** *What are the experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties as they transition from a special educational needs school to post-school educational provision?*
- **RQ2:** *What are parents/carers' experiences and understandings of their son or daughter's experience of transition to post-school educational provision from a special school for children and young people with learning difficulties?*

The transcribed data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and three superordinate themes emerged, in relation to the research questions: Adjusting to Change; Involvement and Support; and Moving Towards Adulthood, which provide insight into the participants' view of their experiences. This chapter will discuss some of the findings and explore them in relation to existing literature and research. The aforementioned themes have been selected because they are particularly striking when considering the research questions.

### **5.3.1 Adjusting to Change**

The data gathered reveals that the young people's experience of their transition from school to college appeared to be largely positive and is illustrated in the manner in which they all spoke with enthusiasm about moving to college, during both interviews. The parents however, reported mixed feelings with regards to how they felt their youngsters had experienced leaving school to move to college.

#### **5.3.1.1 The Emotional Impact of Post-school Transition**

All of the young people were excited about the prospect of making new friends when they moved to college, and emphasised the importance of friendships. However, for two of the young people, their excitement extended to the idea of developing relationships with members of the opposite sex and having a boyfriend or girlfriend. Erickson (1968) proposed that a key aspect of growing up and transition to adulthood is the adoption of 'coherent adult identities' (as cited in Wilkinson, Theodore & Raczka, 2015), which includes the development of relationships and intimacy. The publication 'Valuing People Now: A new three-year strategy for learning disabilities' (Department of Health, 2009), recognises that individuals with learning disabilities like typically developing individuals want to have friendships, be in relationships, marriages and civil partnerships.

However, there is a paucity of research, which has explored the impact that post-school transition has on young people with moderate and other learning difficulties and their social lives. This therefore limits comparisons that can be drawn between this study's participants and others. However, Ricky, Sabina and Sam's views have provided insight, which suggests that this is a prominent aspect of the young people's social and emotional lives that was prompted by their experience of post-school transition. Evidence from the parents' transcripts



revealed that they felt their youngsters had responded well to their transition to college and specifically made references to them making friends at college, which appeared to be a indication for the parents that their youngsters had settled and were happy at college.

The enthusiasm displayed by Ricky and Sabina about going to college continued to be present when they moved, but their transition also appeared to triggered feelings of loss as they openly talked about missing school and wanting to see friends and teachers who were still there, during their second interviews. This finding is poignant as the young people in question had attended the school since they were four and five years old (respectively) and in turn spent a large majority of their lives there. Salzberger-Wittenberg (1999) suggested that as a child or young person progresses through the education system, a number of transitions are experienced (nursery, primary, secondary school and in some cases further education or vocational activities), and are accompanied by an ending. Salzberger-Wittenberg (1999) described an *ending* as “leave-taking, looking back over the past and forward to the future” which also brings with it “loss of the friends and teachers as well as the loss of the institution that we have known and the support we have received” (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999, p.148-149).

By using the psychoanalytic concept of *endings* to think about Ricky and Sabina’s experiences of leaving school an important point can be highlighted: the fact that these young people had never left their school since joining in early years means that neither of them experienced transitioning from one school to another, and that up until then they had not experienced what it actually felt like to move from one institution to another and the loss that accompanies such an experience. With this in mind, it could be argued that Ricky and Sabina’s initial enthusiasm about leaving school may have been genuine excitement, but was

not based on any prior experiences, which in turn meant that they may not have understood the true extent of what leaving school and going to college really meant until they experienced the loss of their teachers and friends from the school. Sam on the other hand who did not appear to experience any feelings of loss in the same way, did previously experience transitions from primary to secondary school and then a change in provision from his mainstream secondary school to Willow school, which may have prepared him for his move to college. In addition, the fact that Sam had only been at the school for four years in comparison to Ricky and Sabina who had been there much longer may also account for his lack of emotion linked to leaving the school. He also appeared to employ a coping strategy which involved drawing on memories of school and individuals there in order to avoid experiencing the feelings of loss that the other young people experienced.

The idea that the young people would feel emotional about leaving school produced mixed views for the parents in this study. For example, when talking about Ricky, Ms Smith felt that his school had '*been a big part of his life*' and in turn he would miss it when he left. This view illustrates the concept of *loss* because Ms Smith focuses on the ending of familiar relationships for Ricky that he has developed at school over the years. Her explanation can also be linked to the psychoanalytic concept of *object-loss*, which is evoked when loss is experienced and is also linked to the psychoanalytic concept *mourning*, which is a psychological process associated with "loss of a loved object" (Rycroft, 1995, pp.105-106), which for Ricky is his school in his mother's opinion.

In contrast however, Mr Nassar believed that despite the fact that Sabina had been at the school for over 10 years, she would not be affected by the move because in his view she is incapable of developing an '*attachment*' with individuals other than her parents. Mr Nassar's

use of the term attachment appears to be linked to its conventional use in language related to the “strong feelings or affection for someone” (Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary, n.d). However, as mentioned earlier, Sabina did in fact express sorrow related to missing her friends and teachers at school, therefore illustrating the ability to build and maintain relationships or “*attachments*” as her father referred to them. Although the psychoanalytic theory of *attachment* and *loss* (Bowlby, 1980) was not developed to discuss the emotional experience of post-school transition, it offers a valuable perspective in understanding the experiences of young people like Ricky and Sabina who have been at the same school for their primary and secondary education. For example, Fisher (1989) explained that the psychological impact of *loss* is “paramount”, and when thinking about the young people in this research, her explanation of loss can be used as it highlights the experience of environmental relocations and the negative impact that it can have on life events (such as post-school transition) as it involves “the termination of a close relationship but simultaneously involves a change of lifestyle and may also include a series of threatening events such as ... loss of friends” (Fisher, 1989, p.10).

Gillan & Coughlan (2010) found that young people with learning difficulties experience the “loss of the highly supported and highly structured” (p.200) environments when they leave school and move on to post-school provision. Maddison & Beresford (2012) also found that post-school transition is a “significant emotional journey” for young people (p.484). However, there is a scarcity of research in this particular area, which has explored the emotional impact of post-school transition for young people with moderate and other learning difficulties and in comparison, more attention has focused on the emotional experiences of parents and carer’s during post-school transition (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Heslop & Abbott, 2007; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; and Maddison & Beresford, 2012). Although the views of

parents have frequently been explored in relation to their own experiences during young people's transition from school to other activities it was evident in this research that they did not focus on themselves and instead spent time focusing on their youngsters' experiences.

#### **5.3.1.1 A Phased Transition**

It was clear that the opportunity to go to the college on a part-time basis while attending school (whether explicitly or implicitly stated) was valued by all of the young people and their parents and appeared to have a positive impact on their transition experiences. For example, the parents expressed that they felt positive about the young people moving to college because it was an environment that they were familiar with and had the chance to develop positive relationships with adults and peers there before their eventual move. The parents' accounts also highlighted that they felt the structure of the course, which involved the youngsters attending school for two days and college for three days, before eventually leaving school worked because it prepared them in advance for their move and enabled them to settle into college life with ease during their first term of being there. These findings support Heslop & Abbott's, (2007) research, which highlighted that parents value visits to post-school provisions for their youngsters before they move as it helps them to prepare and supports the young people with being able to make "informed decision about their options for the future" (Heslop & Abbott's, 2007, p.493).

Authors have advocated the practice of preparing young people with moderate difficulties for their post-school transition arrangements since the 1980s. For example, Bradley & Hegarty (1983) stressed that "preparation for adult life must begin before the end of compulsory schooling" (p.3), and that such practice provides a "foundation for a co-ordinated

programme” of support, which prepares young people for post-school arrangements related to education, vocational activities and social development.

Ricky spoke about his placement at college and expressed that the experience helped him to become accustomed to the new environment he would be moving to when he said, “*with 6<sup>th</sup> form your only there for two days and you’re in college the rest of the week, and its like your getting used to college*” (Ricky, 38.1201-1203). Sabina and Sam however were not as explicit about their placements during their interviews, but Sabina did talk about looking forward to going to college to see the friends she had made there, which indicates that her experience of the placement had been positive and supported her with being able to build relationships with peers and staff in preparation for her eventual move to college. The impact that being on a double placement had on Sam was also evident in the way in which he talked about how he believed things would continue to be the same at college after he left school. This may represent his idea that his move to college is a continuation of the part-time placement he experienced while he was at school.

This research therefore illustrates the benefit of providing the young people in this study with an introduction to college, its routines, environment, staff and peers as it provided them with the opportunity to adjust to the idea of being there before leaving school and positively supported their transition as they moved from one setting to another. Although not related to post-school transition, research carried out by Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons & Siraj-Blatchford (2008), also heightened the importance of induction opportunities during children’s transition from primary to secondary school, and found that key features of successful transitions for vulnerable children (including those with special educational needs)

comprised of “very close links and co-ordination between primary and secondary schools” and included opportunities for “induction, taster days and visits between schools” (p.5).

### **5.3.2 Involvement and Support**

The data gathered revealed that the young people’s experience of being involved and making choices about their future and what would happen after leaving school differed as some felt they had been able to make decisions and were listened to by the adults around them, whilst one young person expressed that she had not participated in meetings. The parents on the other hand all expressed that they were involved in meetings and had the opportunity to contribute to the process. However, what differed among them was their level of perceived involvement. The parents also focused on the support that they had received from staff members at the school and college, which they all expressed helped them to think about the young people’s transition and what the best next step for them would be.

#### **5.3.2.1 Contribution to the Process**

The findings in this study reveal that parents generally felt that they had the opportunity to be a part of meetings at the school or college, which aimed to explore and discuss their youngsters’ post-school arrangements. What differed among the parents however, was the degree to which they felt they contributed to the process and in particular, making decisions.

For example, Mr Nassar expressed that he had been a part of meetings that took place at Sabina’s school related to discussing what she would move on to do after leaving school. However it was evident that throughout the process, he viewed the professionals as experts and best placed to make decisions about his daughter’s future. This resulted in Mr Nassar agreeing to and accepting the post-school arrangements that were presented to him as opposed

to him making requests related to her educational placement. Such findings are similar to the research discussed in the systematic literature review, which found that a minority of parents in Maddison & Beresford's study (2012) felt that they had taken on a passive role during core decision-making related to their son or daughter's future because they saw it as the professional's role. Another explanation for Mr Nassar's level of involvement could be related to the idea that he feels powerless in relation to making decisions for Sabina related to her learning needs quite possibly because he feels that he does not fully understand them. This feeling may have been triggered for him by the transition preparation.

In contrast however, Ms Smith expressed that she felt professionals had listened to her views and actively involved her in meetings related to Ricky's post-school transition, which has also been found in previous research (Ward et al., 2003; Pilnick et al., 2011). She also expressed that she felt confident to share her views and oppose any ideas proposed by professionals during meetings that she believed did not meet the needs of her son. However, she generally felt that the teachers at his school knew him well and so were able to suggest next steps that were appropriate and that he would benefit from. Despite expressing the aforementioned however, Ms Smith did question the extent to which her views really had an impact on the process, which reveals some doubt about the contribution she made. Similarly, Maddison & Beresford (2012) also found that some of the parents in their study also questioned their contribution, as they believed it was overridden by the information provided by professionals, which was influenced by funding issues.

Ms Jones appeared to be positive about her involvement in the meetings she attended that explored Sam's progress and post-school provision arrangements. Her comments during her interview revealed that in addition to being a part of meetings and receiving information from

staff members at Sam's school and the college, she exercised her right as a parent to explore alternative options such as other colleges and vocational organisations. Unlike previous research by Maddison & Beresford, (2012), which found that parents felt forced to look for information on their own because it was not provided by the school, Ms Jones' decision to do so did not appear to be linked to lack of support from the school, but rather related to her need to ensure that she and Sam were informed of all possible options and had the opportunity to make an informed decision about where and what he would be doing next.

Despite the differences in experiences among the parents related to their involvement in meetings and their contribution to the process, what was striking, was that none of the parents or young people referred to the meetings they attended as transition meetings or Annual Reviews and did not make any references to the existence or creation of a transition plan for their youngsters, both of which are statutory requirements for young people leaving school with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

This can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, as the parents having a similar experience to those in the research conducted by Ward et al. (2003), who found that some parents were unaware or had not experienced any transition planning. On the other hand however, as the parents and in some cases the young people expressed that they believed that thought and consideration had gone into thinking about their needs, it could be argued that the school did in fact meet their statutory responsibilities related to supporting the young people and their parents with their transition, but adopted a different name or approach to doing so. This view is also supported by the fact that none of the parents expressed concern or dissatisfaction with the meetings and planning provided by the school, during the process. Such findings illustrate



that what was important during this time was that the young people and their parents were involved and supported to think about what would be happening next.

### **5.3.2.1 Post-school Choices and Options Available**

This study reveals that the young people appeared to have varying experiences related to whether or not they believe they were able to make choices about what they wanted to do after leaving school. For example, Ricky articulated that he felt he had been given a choice by the adults around him such as his mother and school staff. It could be argued that this was not the case as his choice to do cookery was not honoured by the adults around him however it appears that he is happy with the decisions made because he understands the benefits of them.

Sam also expressed that he had the opportunity to make decisions about his post-school arrangements and a factor that heavily influenced his choice was the opportunity to travel to college on his own. Previous research in this area has found that young people value the opportunity to make decisions related to their post-school transition and future (Ward et al., 2003), which also appeared to be the case with Sam and Ricky in this study.

In contrast however, Sabina's responses implied that she had not been able to make choices related to her future. A reason for this however, was suggested by Mr Nassar who insinuated that attempts might have been made to explore her wishes but they would not have been taken into account because:

*“You can't really believe what she says you know what I mean, she just jumps from one thing to another so it changes from minute to minute” (Mr Nassar, p26.797-801)*

Previous research by Murphy et al. (2010) has suggested that this may be the case because parents feel that young people with moderate and severe learning difficulties are incapable of making their own choices, which could have been the same for Sabina as her father.

Views about post-school options available appeared to be an area of concern for some of the parents in this study. For example, Ms Smith felt strongly about the fact that her son was not afforded with the same range of options and choices that young people without learning difficulties have, and voiced her dissatisfaction towards the inequality that she believes exists in society related to the lack of post-school opportunities available. She did however make it clear that she felt the school had done all they could and was not dissatisfied with their efforts and support but that the issue of unequal opportunities lay with wider societal organisations. Similarly, Mr Nassar experienced difficulty accessing extra-curricular activities for Sabina despite his attempts to discuss the possibility with professionals from different services. In contrast however, Ms Jones felt positive about being able to access services, funding and extra-curricular activities for her son throughout the process and felt confident about knowing where to go with regards to this.

### **5.3.3 Moving Towards Adulthood**

The study's findings revealed that preparing the young people for their transition from school to college, triggered thoughts and questions linked to post-college opportunities, adulthood, independence and what would be available for them to move on to after they had completed their college courses.

### **5.3.3.1 Career Goals**

The study's findings revealed that all of the young people were able to articulate their aspirations for the future, which largely consisted of career goals. The level of detail provided however, differed considerably for example, Ricky appeared to have clear plans related to his goals and what he could do to achieve them. Ricky's discussion also included an appraisal of his current skills in relation to his goals, which illustrates that he has a realistic view of his abilities. Sabina and Sam were also able to share their career goals but appeared unable to talk about how they would achieve them. Such findings however are similar to a number of other studies, which have found that young people with learning difficulties expect that they will move on to full-time employment or further education after leaving formal education (MacIntyre, 2014; Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Smyth & McConkey, 2003).

The desire to find employment displayed by the young people in this research and previous research may be the result of societal views and constructions of employment, as gaining employment has long been "regarded, at least in Western Societies, as important goals on the road to adulthood" (Hirst & Baldwin, 1994, p.11). Similarly, it has been suggested that having a job is viewed as an essential aspect of "status as an adult" (McGinty & Fish, 1992, p.68). More recently, neoliberal views of citizenship have focused on the "responsibilities that the individual has to contribute to society via paid employment" (MacIntyre, 2014, p.858). However, the young people's explanations for wanting to gain employment were not made entirely clear in this study.

When exploring the parents' thoughts about their youngsters' aspirations, the study's results revealed differences in this area. For example, Ms Smith's description of Ricky's desire to do cookery aligned with his account and also illustrates that she supports his goals. Ms Jones on

the other hand acknowledged Sam's desire to inflate bouncy castles but appeared to focus on his strengths and related possible career goals with this. Previous research like the current study found that the parents of young people with learning difficulties articulated aspirations for their youngsters such as seeing them engage in activities such as employment or education although they did acknowledge that such goals could be difficult to realistically achieve (Smyth & McConkey, 2003). When talking to Mr Nassar however, it was clear that he had not explored career goals with Sabina or the prospect of her gaining employment and instead appeared to focus on the idea that learning difficulties were a barrier to her being able to engage in activities such as higher education that other young people might undertake.

### **5.3.3.2 Growth and Independence**

The findings from this study also illustrated that the experience of leaving school to move to college elicited thoughts for both the adults and young people around what would be happening in the next stages of their lives and how to prepare for this. For example, during the young people's interviews, it became increasingly apparent that their transition from school to college elicited ideas about adulthood and for some of the participants acted as a 'marker' for the beginning of adulthood and increased responsibility. Ricky and Sabina expressed ambitions of wanting to leave home and live independently, which appeared to excite them as they felt independence would be accompanied by reduced supervision and increased opportunities for visits from boyfriends and outings to town. Sabina and Sam's views related to them viewing their move to college as a move towards increased freedom were also demonstrated by young people in Murphy et al. (2010) and MacIntyre's (2014) research, which revealed that they saw their move towards adulthood as an opportunity to have new privileges such as increased privacy and being treated like adults, but did not see it as a move from one stage in life to another. Although Ricky had also acknowledged the new

privileges that came with moving to college, it was clear that he understood that his move to college also signaled his move from childhood towards adulthood, which he articulated.

Some of the parents showed some enthusiasm about their youngsters growing up, being able to gain more independence and developing their self-help skills. However, all of the parents voiced concerns about their youngsters' potential vulnerability as they got ready to move to college, especially relation to others in society. Gilligan & Coughlan (2010) also found that parents "feared" living apart from their youngster and felt that they would have a "poorer quality of life" and less opportunities related to employment because of their learning difficulties (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010, p.199).

During the second interviews however, Ms Smith and Ms Jones appeared less anxious about their sons growing up and gaining independence and also recognised that their confidence was increasing. In turn opportunities for the young men such as travel training and going on short familiar journeys independently were encouraged. It could be suggested that travel symbolised independence and new opportunities to explore the world, for the young people and in turn a reason why it is particularly important to Sam.

Previous research by Tarleton & Ward (2005) found that parents of young people with learning difficulties were similarly concerned about their youngster's ability to take on responsibilities, which could explain why Sabina was not allowed to travel on her own. However, the fact that Sabina is a girl and has not yet been afforded with such opportunities for independence, begs the question if the differences amongst Ricky, Sam and Sabina are linked to the parents' ideas about gender roles in society.

In attempting to understand transitions, Zittoun (2006) used Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural framework to explore the term *rupture*, which has been described as the "uncertainty that sometimes arises from change ... to a person's sphere of experience" (as cited in Crafter and Maunder, 2012:13). This framework can be applied to understanding the move from school to college for the young people and their parents in this study because in addition to the "changes in relationships" (Zittoun, 2006 as in Crafter and Maunder, 2012:13), the need to develop new friendships and to understand new cultural expectations of the organisation, the parents in this study appeared to focus more on what is available for the young person when they leave college and enter the adult world and whether or not the young people would succeed during adulthood.

#### **5.4 Critical Evaluation of the Methodology**

The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse the data produced by the young people and their parents enabled the researcher to produce an insightful and multi-perspective account of the experiences associated with post-school transition.

As the researcher's epistemological stance was committed to looking at individuals' perceptions of an experience (Willig, 2008), the use of IPA as an analytic tool made it possible for the researcher to "access an individual's cognitive inner world" (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p215) in order to explore their experiences of post-school transition.

Given the idiographic standpoint that IPA assumes, the use of a small and homogenous sample of participants (three young people and three parents), recruited from the same school allowed the researcher to answer the research questions through an in-depth exploration of the their experiences. As this research adopted a multi-perspective approach, which involved

exploring a number of different perspectives (parents and young people) regarding experiences of post-school transition, the researcher had to ensure that the idiographic nature associated with IPA was maintained in this research. For example, when analysing the data produced by the each of the six cases, the researcher ensured that when “probing deeper into the particular” (Warnock, 1987 as cited in Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.183) of their accounts the uniqueness of their responses were illuminated. This was done by making sure that each of the participants’ views were clearly presented at all stages of analysis so that others are able to distinguish between their views and the researcher’s interpretations of their views.

The researcher also valued the opportunity to familiarise herself with the theory of hermeneutics in this study because it enabled her to explore, examine and make sense of the participants’ experiences of post-school transition through the use of interpretation (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). By actively engaging in the ‘hermeneutic circle’ throughout the study the researcher was able to observe “the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole” (Smith et al., 2009, p.28). In this research the ‘part’ included the specific words and utterances used by the participants in order to describe their experiences, and the ‘whole’ involved looking at individual transcripts and performing a cross-case analysis of all the data in order to examine how the parts may or may not have related to the whole and vice-versa. In doing so this revealed that there were shared themes across all of the participants, which consisted of some convergence and divergence.

The use of double hermeneutics in this research also enabled the researcher to make sense of how the participants made sense of their post-school transition experiences, and acted as a useful tool especially as the young people in this study had communication difficulties and

may have found it difficult to express themselves or to discuss personal experiences (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

The findings from the data collected offer new insight into the experiences for these groups of individuals however given the sample's unique characteristics in the form of the young people's moderate learning difficulties, which meant that each of them had their own unique needs, and the size of the study's sample, it is difficult to determine if the results were representative of the wider population of young people with 'similar' needs and experiences (including that of a double placement at school and college). As a result this could be viewed by some as a limitation of the research however given the theoretical basis of IPA, which focuses on analysing individual cases "in a corpus in detail" (Smith, 2011a, p.10), it did not aim to produce results that can be generalised to the wider population, but rather assessed "in relation to ... existing professional and experiential knowledge" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.4).

Smith (2011a, p.24) put forward some features of a good IPA study, which can be used to examine the quality of research. For example, he suggested that a good IPA study should have a clear focus. It is felt that this study had a clear focus as it explored the experiences of a specific group of young people with learning difficulties, namely those identified as having moderate learning difficulties and their parents in order to understand their experiences of post-school transition. However, it could be argued that the focus of post-school transition could have been narrowed down further to focus solely on a particular aspect of the process (such as planning), in order to gain more focused results. However, based on the gaps in literature including the lack of attention placed on the views of young people with learning difficulties, the researcher strongly felt that there needed to be an attempt to explore this



experience in a somewhat open manner so that the participants had the opportunity to reflect on the experience in an unrestricted way.

Smith (2011a) also suggested that studies should have strong data, which is the result of conducting quality interviews. As some of the young people had communication difficulties this was particularly challenging and in turn, some could question the reliability of the data collected. However a lot of thought and preparation went into thinking about the questions that would be asked to ensure that they were understandable. The researcher also had to monitor the questions and adapt them to meet the needs of the participants during the interviews, in order to ensure that the young people could engage. As a result although the questions retained the same meaning, they were phrased differently depending on the needs of the individual, which could be seen as a weakness. In addition, in order to ensure that the questions produced reliable data, the questions were periodically repeated to ensure that the young people understood what they had been asked and to observe if answers were consistent or needed to be questioned further for more clarity.

Smith (2011a) also argued that the write up of an IPA study should be rigorous and it is felt that the findings presented in this research fulfill this criterion as data from all participants interviewed was presented. This ensured that the experiences of all of the participants (including similarities and differences) were illuminated and discussed. It was also felt that from a moral standpoint all of the voices should be heard in the research as the participants had taken the time to share a significant event in their lives with the researcher. The researcher also ensured that the analysis was rigorous by presenting data from the interview transcripts for each of the themes so that the findings and interpretations made were grounded in data.

#### **5.4.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Multiple-perspectives:**

The decision to use a multi-perspective design and IPA to explore the phenomenon of post-school transition, from the perspectives of young people and parents was a challenging task but worthwhile as it highlighted the multifaceted nature of the experience. The use of multiple-perspectives did not attempt to corroborate or validate the views expressed by any of the participants but instead was employed in order to explore post-school transition from different perspectives. Given the volume of data produced by the six participants (three parent and young person dyads) the analysis of the cases took a considerable amount of time to complete. In addition, decisions regarding how to summarise and present the findings in a way which would best showcase the multi-perspective nature of the study whilst retaining the insights of the “personal lived experience” of the participants was also challenging (Smith, 2011, p.9).

Unlike the task of focusing on single cases, the researcher had to constantly ensure that distinctions were made between the young person’s view, the parent’s view and the parent’s view of their youngster’s experience. Previous research conducted by Clare (2002) adopted a multi-perspective approach whilst using IPA in order to triangulate the data collected thus evidencing the credibility of the findings gained. Larkin, Flowers and Shaw (2015), referred to multi-perspective designs as ‘multi-perspectival designs’ and suggested that they adopt “more complex designs” (p.7), which preserves IPA’s commitment to phenomenology and hermeneutics but in addition “opens up more complex views of the context and dynamics of personal experience” (Larkin et al., 2015, p.8). It is argued that an advantage of multi-perspective designs used with IPA include its “increased ‘inferential power’ and persuasiveness” (Larkin et al., 2015, p.17), as it provides a more transparent and comprehensive view of the experiences being studied, which could be said to avoid

‘anecdotal’ accounts that could be produced when exploring the views of a single perspective (Larkin et al., 2015).

In addition to theoretical influences of hermeneutics and phenomenology, it is also suggested that a multi-perspective approach also draws on the ideas of human systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and family therapy, which acknowledge that “events and processes are best understood by exploring what happens in between the individuals involved” and any differences which emerge can be “reconciled by a third party” who can explore the “patterns of meaning-making” and illuminate important features of the “shared experience” (Larkin et al., 2015, p.19).

#### **5.4.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Learning Difficulties**

The researcher’s experience of employing IPA to analyse the interview data produced by young people with moderate learning difficulties, who also have communication difficulties varied and was significantly more challenging than the parent interviews as they did not have a comparable level of language to articulate their experiences. For example, all of the young people had varying degrees of speech production difficulties and so listening back to the audio recordings was a lengthy process that required replaying the recordings a number of times and close listening, in order to ensure that their responses were being transcribed accurately. Despite this however, all of the young people possessed enough functional language to reflect on their experiences of moving to college, therefore making IPA an appropriate method of analysis in this study.

The interviews with Ricky were both very positive experiences and produced rich data as he openly and articulately talked about his experience of transition from school to college. His

ability to expand on his responses during the interviews also meant that his comments could be further explored. In comparison however, the interviews with Sabina and Sam were a lot more challenging despite their willingness to engage throughout. For example, during their interviews a large amount of their responses to questions were monosyllabic, and in turn the researcher was concerned about whether or not enough rich data would be produced to thoroughly analyse their lived experiences, which IPA aims to do. At certain points during their interviews the researcher also questioned whether or not these young people were repeating what they had been asked, which led to the questions being repeated at different intervals during the interviews. However, when listening to their recordings their responses aligned with their non-verbal cues and views expressed during the entire interviews and in turn were felt to be a true reflection of the young people's opinions.

While listening back to the audio recordings I also discovered that there were moments where the young people enthusiastically talked about issues that appeared to be really important to them. This was my experience of what Smith (2011b) described as 'diving for gems' and were most striking when analysing Sabina and Sam's interview transcripts. In this context, 'gems' are described as "the thing that stands out when you're reading a transcript" and are thought to "shine light on the phenomenon" (Smith, 2011b, p.7). For Sabina and Sam the 'gems' were revealed in their comments linked to their enthusiasm towards leaving school and moving to college, experiencing reduced supervision in the form of independent living, travel and being able to develop relationships with members of the opposite sex.

### **5.4.3 Bolder Design Approach**

The use of a bolder design (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) in this study enabled the researcher to explore the participants' experiences over a period of time especially as

transitions are not an isolated event. This approach was also beneficial because of the young people's learning needs; by conducting the interviews in two phases it provided the young people (and their parents) with the opportunity to articulate their views and answer questions related to their transition experiences as it occurred, as opposed to talking about events that had occurred in the past or which had not yet happened.

Other benefits of conducting two interviews with all of the participants included the researcher being able to listen to the audio recordings from the first interviews after they had taken place, thinking about what had been said and the opportunity to check if the conclusions made accurately reflected what the participants were attempting to articulate, therefore demonstrating content validity. The idea of researchers sharing their "initial impressions" of data with participants was encouraged by Mertens (1995) who suggested that doing so (especially with participants with disabilities) "allowed participants to be informed" about the conclusions being drawn and the chance to say whether they did or did not agree with it (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995, p.110). The second interview also provided the opportunity for the researcher to compare how the participants felt since the young person had left school and moved to college.

Although all of the second interviews were shorter in duration, they all produced additional experiential data that was rich and supported the researcher in being able to explore the participants' lived experiences. It is likely that the additional information shared during the second interview may have occurred because the participants felt more comfortable and familiar with the researcher given their previous experience of taking part in an interview and getting to know her.

#### **5.4.4 Language**

The aim of IPA is to explore individuals' experiences of a phenomenon through the analysis of their verbal accounts and so language played a major role in this research. As semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection the interviewer had the ability to influence the way in which the young people and their parents responded to the task of sharing their lived experiences through the questions presented. In turn the researcher attempted to refrain from using leading questions during the interviews.

As the young people in this study had moderate learning difficulties and communication difficulties the researcher tried to ensure that the language used throughout was simple and understandable so that they could meaningfully engage in the interviews. Past research (Chapman & McNulty, 2004; Hayes, 2004; Aldridge, 2007), that has also attempted to elicit the views of young people with communication difficulties, employed the use of Alternative Augmentative Communication methods (objects, pictures, symbols, and keyword signing), in addition to using verbal communication, which was found to be useful. The use of such methods may have also been useful for some of the young people in this study, however as discussions with a teacher at the school who knew the young people well revealed that they would not respond well to the use of visual resources because they would perceive them as 'childish', the researcher refrained from using visuals and focused on adapting the questions asked during the interviews. The researcher also ensured that the questions asked were "specific and concrete" as opposed to abstract so that the participants could meaningfully engage in the interviews (Biken & Moseley, 1988 as cited in Beresford, 1997, p.57).

## **5.5 Implications for Future Research**

The findings presented in this study demonstrate that there are a number of factors that need to be considered and explored further when thinking about the experiences and needs of parents and in particular young people with moderate learning difficulties during their post-school transition.

For example, the emotional impact of post-school transition for the young people was striking in this research and highlights that in addition to the more observable consequences of transition and leaving school, young people with learning difficulties also experience difficult feelings, which at times are not observable, but inevitably impact their experience. In turn, future research could develop the findings presented in this study by focusing on the emotional impact of post-school transition on young people in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of how it affects them at this time in their lives and so that schools and colleges can take such needs into account when supporting them during the process. The emotional lives of young people with moderate and other learning difficulties should also be explored, as there is little research that has focused on this aspect, and this research has highlighted that it is a prominent area for the young people during their transition that should be supported.

When thinking about the parents' experience of the post-transition process, this study's findings highlighted differing views related to their perceived contribution (e.g. decision-making) to the process and so further research could delve deeper and explore this particular aspect of transition for the parents and what they feel has influenced this. It was touched upon in this research but would be interesting to develop further.

## **5.6 Links to Educational Psychologists' Practice**

An exploration of each of the participants' views and experiences revealed no mention of support or input from Educational Psychologists (EPs) during the young people's post-school transition. However, the findings from this research uncovered potentially significant implications for EPs, which can be considered from two different perspectives: the support that EPs may require in order to effectively support young people and their families; and the support that EPs can provide during post-school transition.

On a national level, the profession of Educational Psychology has recently witnessed a number of significant changes including the introduction of the New Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) and the Children and Families Act (2014). Such changes have brought with it new implications for EPs as they are now required to work with young people up to the age of 25 years old once there is evidence that they are still in education or training (Council for Disabled Children, 2014).

This in turn has created new opportunities for EPs to support young people with learning difficulties (and those supporting them). However, working with young people aged 19-25 years old can be considered as 'new territory' for most EPs and in turn it could be argued that in order to effectively support this group both qualified EPs and those in training may benefit from training in order to develop (or adapt) the appropriate skills, knowledge and resources needed to effectively support young people aged 16 and over during post-school transition (DECP Committee, 2014). For example, training can focus on the ethical implications associated with working adults such as gaining informed consent and implementing the Mental Capacity Act (2005), in order to ensure that all practice is legal and ethical.



When thinking about the support that EPs can provide to key stakeholders, a number of areas have been identified. For example, on an individual level EPs have the ability to contribute to statutory processes related to post-school transition such as Annual Reviews. EPs routinely support children and young people in Years 5 and 9 because these years are considered to be times where preparation for transition to a new setting and stage of life is necessary. However, as EPs are now also expected to support young people up to the age of 25 years old, young people transitioning from school to post-16 settings can also benefit from the input of EPs during this time who can support the process.

The findings of this study also revealed the significant emotional impact of post-school transition on young people and their parents and EPs have the potential to support families, schools and colleges during this time. For example, EPs are able to support parents and professionals' understanding of the importance of ensuring that young people experience a smooth post-school transition, which consists of advanced preparation and a well planned induction so that young people who have spent a large portion of their lives at the same school do not experience "sudden endings and abrupt beginnings" (YoungMinds, 2016, para.26). For example, EPs have the ability to facilitate therapeutic groups, which focus on preparing young people for post-school transition and the changes that they will be experiencing in advance of their move. Such support has been found to help "individuals make meaning of their transition from one life phase to the next", which can be "strengthened through collaborative relationships with others in similar situations" (Lane, 2013, p21).

Some young people with learning difficulties may experience communication difficulties, which may impact their ability to express any emotions they experience related to their transition from school to post-school provision. In turn, EPs have the ability to provide

therapeutic support for young people who have or are experiencing a transition in order to ensure that they have the opportunity to explore their feelings associated with leaving school and so that any difficult or unprocessed feelings can be explored.

On a broader level, EPs can work systemically with staff from organisations such as schools, colleges and other post-school settings in order to provide guidance on how to appropriately meet the emotional needs of young people with learning difficulties during their transition. EP support may take the form of training, which aims to develop adults' knowledge of the psychological theories and concepts associated with transition such as Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1980), loss (Rycroft, 1995) and endings (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999). In doing so such support may provide the adults with a better understanding of the impact that transitions can have on young people with learning difficulties, which in turn will support them to be better equipped with providing support during this time.

The findings of this research also highlighted the emotional impact that the young people's post-school transition experiences can have on parents as it is evident that the experience of preparing youngsters for their move from school can trigger feelings of anxiety and concern not just about the young people leaving school and moving to college but also about what will happen after college. In turn, EPs can support parents during this time by employing the use of consultations, which will offer the opportunity to engage in problem solving and the exploration of questions and concerns related to the process so that they feel more prepared and able to think about the future and the young people's move towards adulthood. EPs can also offer support in the form of signposting parents towards agencies for further information and support.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusions**

The systematic literature review presented in chapter 2 demonstrates that although there is research that has explored post-school transition for parents and young people, there are gaps in the literature in the United Kingdom related to this area of study and in particular regarding the views for young people with moderate learning difficulties.

In order to address these gaps the present research focused on the post-school transition experiences of three young people with moderate learning difficulties and their parents in order to explore their experiences of the process. By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher gave the young people and their parents the opportunity to share their ‘lived experiences’ of this significant event in their lives.

IPA was used to analyse the data collected from the participants and revealed three overarching group super-ordinate themes: (i) Adjusting to Change; (ii) Involvement and Support; and (iii) Moving Towards Adulthood. The themes revealed that the young people’s experience of their transition from school to college was met with enthusiasm as it signaled new friendships and increased independence. Feelings of loss however appeared to be experienced by the young people once they had left school and moved to college. The findings also revealed that the young people appreciated being involved and making choices about their future, although experiences of this differed as some felt they had been able to make decisions and were listened to in comparison to others who expressed that they had not participated in meetings.

In relation to the parents’ experience, mixed feelings were reported in relation to how they felt their youngsters experienced leaving school to move to college, as some felt that they missed

school while others believed that they did not. All of the parents reported that they felt involved in meetings related to their youngsters transition and had the opportunity to contribute but reported differing levels of involvement. In particular, a prominent finding for the parents was their thoughts, questions and concerns regarding future opportunities, adulthood, independence and what would be available for the young people to move on to after they had completed their college courses, which appeared to be triggered by the experience of the post-school transition.

By exploring the post-school transition experiences of the young people and their parents, the research demonstrates the need for EPs to support professionals' understanding of the emotional impact of transition and ways in which young people can be supported during this time. It also highlights the role that EPs can take in supporting the young people through the use of therapeutic approaches during this time of significant change in their lives.

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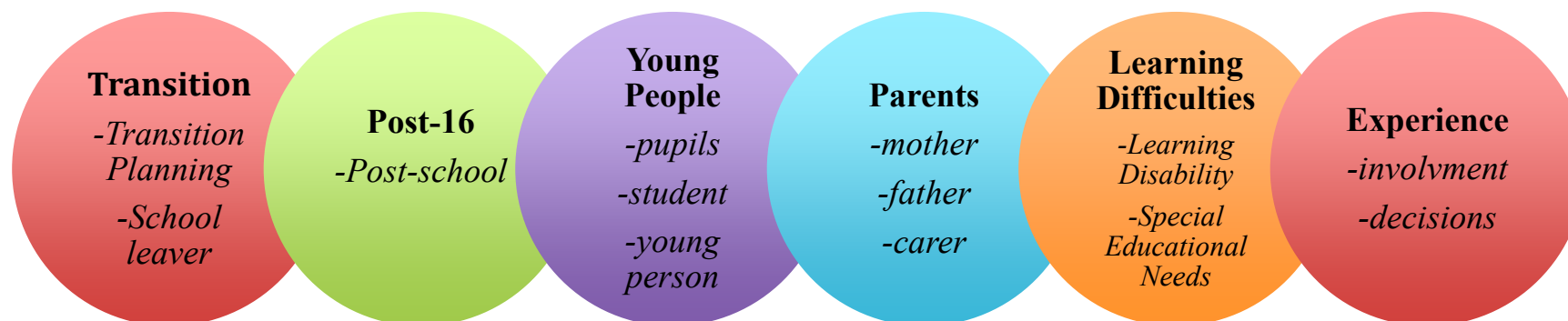
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# Appendices

### Appendix 1 - Venn diagram with search terms



The diagrammatic illustration was used to break down the Systematic Literature Review questions into its component parts so that the researcher could identify possible key terms to include in the literature search.



## Appendix 2 - Inclusion and exclusion criteria employed for the Systematic Literature Review

Parameters	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
<b>Location</b>	Research conducted in the United Kingdom and Ireland.	Research conducted outside of the United Kingdom and Ireland.	Differences in education systems around the world and associated legislation and policies related to learning difficulties and post-school transition.
<b>Language</b>	Studies published in English.	Studies not published in English.	Difficulty associated with having articles translated (time, money etc.).
<b>Time Frame</b>	Research that has been published between 2000-2015.	Research that was published before 2000.	To reflect current practice in light of policy and legislation changes.
<b>Population</b>	Research that include young people (13-25 years old) who have learning difficulties (primarily cognition and learning) and/or their parents/ carers.	Research that does not include young people (13-25 years old) who have learning difficulties (primarily cognition and learning) and/or their parents/ carers.	This review aims to explore the experiences of post-school transition to educational provision for young people with Learning Difficulties and/or their parents/carers. The inclusion of studies with 13 year olds reflects the idea that transition planning occurs in year 9. The inclusion of young people up to the age of 25 reflects recent policy (Children and Families Act 2014).
<b>Research Design</b>	Research that includes the use of qualitative research as the main method of data collection (e.g. Qualitative or mixed-methods research).	Research that does not include qualitative data collection methods and analysis.	As qualitative approaches set out to describe and explore the experiences of individuals as they view them, the inclusion of such studies will support the exploration of the review questions.
<b>Publication Type</b>	Journal articles	Literature reviews and book reviews	Journal articles will include empirical research, which will explore research/ evidence related to the review's research questions.
<b>Outcome</b>	Research that focuses on the experiences of young people and/ or	Research that does not focus on experiences of young people and/ or	As the aim of the systematic review is to explore what existing literature tells us about the experiences of

	their parents/ carers during transition to post-school provision.	parents/ carers or move onto post-school provision.	post-school transition for parents of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/ carers, the literature should include research that focuses on such outcomes in order to support exploration of this area.
<b>Quality Assurance</b>	Research that has been peer-reviewed.	Research that has not been peer-reviewed.	To ensure that the quality of the research published has been assessed and is of a good quality.

### Appendix 3 – Articles excluded at the Second-Pass screening stage

Reference:	Reason for exclusion
Baer, R. M., Flexer, R. W., Beck, S., Amstutz, N., Hoffman, L., Brothers, J., Zechman, C. (2003). A collaborative follow up study on transition service utilization and post-school outcomes. <i>Career Development for Exceptional Individuals</i> , 26(1), 7-25.	Research carried out in the United States of America (USA).
Bianco, M., Garrison-Wade, D. F., Tobin, R., & Lehmann, J. P. Parents' Perceptions of Postschool Years for Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities. 47(3), 186-196.	Research carried out in the USA.
Cook, B. G., Gerber, M. M., & Murphy, J. (2000). Backlash against the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in higher education: implications for transition from post-secondary environments to work. <i>Work</i> , 14(1), 31-40.	Research carried out in the USA.
Cook, B. G., & Rumrill, P. D., Jr. (2000). Inclusion and transition: partners in progress or policy paradox? <i>Work</i> , 14(1), 13-21.	This journal articles presents a review of the terms 'inclusion' and 'transition' as opposed to presenting primary research, which explores the experiences of transition from the point of view of young people or parents/ carers.
Cooney, G., Jahoda, A., Gumley, A., & Knott, F. (2006). Young people with intellectual disabilities attending mainstream and segregated schooling: perceived stigma, social comparison and future aspirations. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disability Research</i> , 50(6), 432-444.	The outcomes of this research were not focused on the experiences of young people or parent/ carers.
Davies, M. D., & Beamish, W. Transitions from School for Young Adults with Intellectual Disability: Parental Perspectives on "Life as an Adjustment". 34(3), 248-257.	Research carried out in Australia.
Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational context, student satisfaction, and post-compulsory progress. <i>International Journal of Language &amp; Communication Disorders</i> , 44(1), 36-55.	Outcome focused on support and performance in examinations rather than the process and experiences of transition for young people.
Eaves, R. C., Rabren, K., & Hall, G. The Post-School Outcomes Transition Survey: A Tool for Effective Decision Making? , 38(1), 30-39.	Research carried out in the USA.
Gray, K. M., Piccinin, A., Keating, C. M.,	Research carried out in Australia.

Taffe, J., Parmenter, T. R., Hofer, S., . . . Tonge, B. J. (2014). Outcomes in young adulthood: are we achieving community participation and inclusion? <i>Journal of Intellectual Disability Research</i> , 58(8), 734-745.	This study focused on the changes in living arrangements and participation in daytime activities rather than the experiences of the transition.
Grigal, M., Hart, D., & Migliore, A. (2011). Comparing the transition planning, postsecondary education, and employment outcomes of students with intellectual and other disabilities. <i>Career Development for Exceptional Individuals</i> , 34(1), 4-17.	Research carried out in the USA.
Kaehne, A., & Beyer, S. (2009). 'Views of professionals on aims and outcomes of transition for young people with learning disabilities'. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i> , 37(2), 138-144.	Research did not include the views of young people or parents and instead focused on professionals' views/ experiences.
Ineichen, B. (1993). Service use among school leavers with severe learning difficulties: the views of carers. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disability Research</i> , 37(1), 53-63.	Research published before 2000.
Katsiyannis, A., Zhang, D., Woodruff, N., & Dixon, A. (2005). Transition Supports to Students with Mental Retardation: An Examination of Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2. <i>Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities</i> , 40(2), 109-116.	Research carried out in the USA.
Li, J.-Y., Bassett, D. S., & Hutchinson, S. R. Secondary Special Educators' Transition Involvement. 34(2), 163-172.	Does not focus on the views of young people or parents. Research was carried out in the USA. Use of quantitative methods only.
Lindstrom, L., Paskey, J., Dickinson, J., Doren, B., Zane, C., & Johnson, P. Voices from the Field: Recommended Transition Strategies for Students and School Staff. 29(2), 4-15.	Research carried out in the USA.
Mangan, J., Adnett, N., & Davies, P. (2001). Movers and Shakers: Determinants of Post-16 Educational Choice. 6(1), 31-50.	Research regarding young peoples' choices about staying on at school versus leaving but does not explore experiences associated with post-school transition.
Michaels, C. A., & Ferrara, D. L. (2006). Promoting Post-School Success for All: The Role of Collaboration in Person-Centered Transition Planning. 16(4), 287-313.	Research carried out in the USA. Presents a review of information but no actual or empirical research carried out.
Taylor, B. J., McGilloway, S., & Donnelly, M. (2004). Preparing young adults with disability for employment. <i>Health &amp; Social Care in the Community</i> , 12(2), 93-101.	Research outcomes related to young people's preparation for jobs as opposed to their transition experiences.

van Niekerk, M. (2007). A career exploration programme for learners with special educational needs. <i>Work</i> , 29(1), 19-24 16.	Research carried out in South Africa.
Foskett, N., Dyke, M., & Maringe, F. The Influence of the School in the Decision to Participate in Learning Post-16. 34(1), 37-61.	Does not include pupils with Special educational needs.

#### Appendix 4 – Articles excluded after full text review

Reference:	Reason for exclusion
Beresford, B. (2004). On the road to nowhere? Young disabled people and transition. <i>Child: Care, Health &amp; Development</i> , 30(6), 581-587 587p.	Review of literature related to post-school transition as opposed to primary/empirical research conducted.
Carroll, C., & Dockrell, J. (2010). Leaving special school: Post-16 outcomes for young adults with specific language impairment. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 25(2), 131-147.	Research focuses on young people with Specific Language impairment rather than cognition and learning needs.
Carroll, C., & Dockrell, J. (2012). Enablers and challenges of post-16 education and employment outcomes: the perspectives of young adults with a history of SLI. <i>International Journal of Language &amp; Communication Disorders</i> , 47(5), 567-577.	Research focuses on young people with Specific Language impairment rather than cognition and learning needs.
Kaehne, A., & Beyer, S. (2014). Person-centred reviews as a mechanism for planning the post-school transition of young people with intellectual disability. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disability Research</i> , 58(7), 603-613.	Primary focus of the research is on the Person-Centred Review meetings as a process as opposed to the experience of transition.
Palikara, O., Lindsay, G., & Dockrell, J. E. (2009). Voices of young people with a history of specific language impairment (SLI) in the first year of post-16 education. <i>International Journal of Language &amp; Communication Disorders</i> , 44(1), 56-78.	Research focuses on young people with Specific Language impairment rather than cognition and learning needs.
Shah, S. (2005). Voices and choices: How education influences the career choices of young disabled people. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 5(3), 112-117.	Young people included have physical disabilities as main presenting need. Focus of the research is also on career choices as opposed to post-school transition experiences.

**Appendix 5 - CASP: Examination of journal articles included in the literature review**

<p align="center"><i>Journal Title</i></p> <p><i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i></p>	<p><b>Heslop, P. &amp; Abbott, D. (2009). Help to move on - but to what? Young people with learning difficulties moving on from out-of-area residential schools or colleges. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i>, 37(1), 12-20.</b></p>
<p><b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Although it was clear from reading the paper what the aim(s) were they were not explicitly stated in the article until the conclusion.</p>
<p><b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b></p>	<p>Yes. As this study wanted to explore the firsthand (subjective) experiences of young people, parents and staff the use of qualitative research was appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from parents and professionals. The purpose of the interviews were to illuminate the participants' experiences of leaving residential special school.</p>
<p><b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. This study appeared to use purposive sampling although not specifically mentioned. Some form of inclusion criteria appeared to be used, which was appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b></p>	<p>Yes. A discussion was provided by the authors and also included the context in which the research took place.</p>
<p><b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b></p>	<p>Prior to recruitment it was clear that the researchers considered the needs of the young people and in turn provided resources that they could access and would help them to understand the nature of the research so that they could make an informed decision about their participation.</p>
<p><b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b></p>	<p>Yes. A discussion about gaining ethical approval, consent and how the young people were supported with being able to meaningfully participate during the interviews was provided.</p>
<p><b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b></p>	<p>There was no mention of the method of data analysis employed in this study. The analysis appeared largely descriptive.</p>
<p><b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b></p>	<p>Yes. For each of the themes identified the findings were presented.</p>
<p><b>How valuable is the research?</b></p>	<p>The research provides valuable information on the experiences of parents' and staff members' views. It would have been helpful however to present more data which explored the young peoples' views and experiences.</p>

<i>Journal Title</i>	<b>Heslop, P. &amp; Abbott, D. (2007). School's out: Pathways for young people with intellectual disabilities from out-of-area residential schools or colleges. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disability Research</i>, 51(7), 489-496.</b>
<i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i>	
<b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b>	Although it was clear from reading the paper what the aim(s) may have been they were not explicitly stated. A specific statement would have been more helpful.
<b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b>	Yes. As this study wanted to explore the firsthand (subjective) experiences of parents and staff, the use of qualitative research was appropriate.
<b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. The use of semi-structured interviews was useful as it enabled the researchers to explore the participants' views of post-school transition and what they believe contributed to satisfactory outcomes.
<b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b>	Yes. The article included explanations regarding the recruitment of participant and information related to how they were identified.
<b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b>	Yes, but it would have been better if more attention was dedicated to the views of the young people.
<b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b>	There was no explicit mention of power imbalance issues (considering that participants were offered a monetary gift for their participation).
<b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b>	Yes. Issues surrounding participants' informed consent and confidentiality were discussed.
<b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b>	Yes. An explanation of the method of data analysis used in this study was provided along with the measures taken to ensure reliability (e.g. the use of two coders to examine inter-rater reliability). The use of verbatim quotes was also useful in presenting interpretations of the data collected.
<b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b>	Yes. Towards the latter part of the article. A discussion of the strengths and limitations was also provided.
<b>How valuable is the research?</b>	The research is useful as it presented the views of parents and provides links to policy and research.



<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Journal Title</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; width: 100%; margin: 0;"/> <p><i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i></p>	<p><b>Smyth, M., &amp; McConkey, R. (2003). Future aspirations of students with severe learning disabilities and of their parents on leaving special schooling. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i>, 31(1), 54-59.</b></p>
<p><b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The study has two aims, which were clearly presented for readers.</p>
<p><b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b></p>	<p>Yes. As the research aimed to explore the aspirations of individuals, which is subjective in nature the use of a qualitative approach was appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. Semi-structured interviews were used with parents and young people to explore aspirations and views regarding post-school provision and experiences. This approach enabled the researchers to address the research aims and explore anything else that may have been significant for the participants.</p>
<p><b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The strategy used was clear and the approach to sampling and the inclusion criteria used was also discussed. No information was provided about how the young people decided whether or not they took part in the research.</p>
<p><b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b></p>	<p>Yes. A description of where data was collected was explained. A justification for the use of semi-structured interviews and why it was chosen was also provided.</p>
<p><b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b></p>	<p>No discussion about this or possible issues related to bias. No discussion about the formulation of the research questions.</p>
<p><b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b></p>	<p>No explicit references made to ethical considerations (approval, consent, confidentiality etc.).</p>
<p><b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b></p>	<p>No clear discussion about the method of data analysis employed, but the data was presented thematically under OECD transition goals.</p>
<p><b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b></p>	<p>Yes, in the discussion.</p>
<p><b>How valuable is the research?</b></p>	<p>This research is relevant as it offers some insight into the experiences during transition for this population of learners.</p>

<i>Journal Title</i>	<b>Maddison, J., &amp; Beresford, B. (2012). Decision-making around moving on from full-time education: The roles and experiences of parents of disabled young people with degenerative conditions. <i>Health &amp; Social Care in the Community</i>, 20(5), 477-487.</b>
<i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i>	
<b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. This was clearly stated in the article.
<b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b>	Yes. As this research aimed to look at parents' experiences of decision-making, the use of a qualitative approach enabled the researchers to explore the research questions.
<b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. The use of interviews (no mention of what type) sought to interpret and illuminate the experiences of the participants. The use of a longitudinal approach also enabled the researchers to explore the participants' experiences at different points in time, which supported the exploration of the aims of the study.
<b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b>	Yes. The recruitment of participants, exclusion criteria is discussed in this article.
<b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b>	Yes. The use of interviews allowed the researchers to explore the research aims. Modifications were made in order to ensure that the interviews were accessible, which were discussed in this article.
<b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b>	No references made in relation to this. Discussions about possible bias or the formulation of the research questions was not provided.
<b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b>	Yes. A discussion about ethical considerations such as informed consent was included.
<b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b>	Yes. A discussion about the use of Thematic Analysis in the research was included and associated limitations were acknowledged.
<b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b>	Yes. The findings are weaved into the findings/discussion. A clear statement however would have been very helpful. Issues related to reliability and validity was not included.
<b>How valuable is the research?</b>	This research is valuable. It provides insight into the process of choice making and the emotional experience of post-school transition. Possible connections with other groups were not made.

<i>Journal Title</i>	<b>Gillan, D., &amp; Coughlan, B. (2010). Transition from special education into postschool services for young adults with intellectual disability: Irish parents' experience. <i>Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities</i>, 7(3), 196-203.</b>
<i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i>	
<b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. This study attempted to address gaps in knowledge, to focus on the impact of post-school transition on parents and to identify what facilitates and acts as barriers during the transition experiences.
<b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b>	Yes. Interviews were used with open-ended questions in order to explore broad areas linked to the literature and the experiences of the individuals.
<b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. Given that the research wanted to explore individuals' experiences. The use of open-ended questions allowed the researchers to do so.
<b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b>	Yes. An explanation of the participants' recruitment, inclusion/ exclusion criteria used and participants' profile was provided.
<b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b>	Yes. The use of open-ended questions enabled the exploration of this topic area.
<b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b>	Yes. A description of the use of independent coders in order to ensure reliability was provided, which demonstrates that the researchers want to ensure that their interpretations were representative of the participants' views.
<b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b>	Yes. Explicit references were made regarding the ethical approval and other considerations associated with the study.
<b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b>	Yes. Grounded Theory was used to analyse the data. A clear description of its use was provided.
<b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b>	Yes. This has been provided in the discussion.
<b>How valuable is the research?</b>	Yes. Links to policy and previous research has been made and the authors also provided suggestions for future research. The researchers also acknowledged the study's limitations.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Journal Title</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"/> <p><i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i></p>	<p><b>Ward, L., Mallet., R., Heslop., P. &amp; Simons, K. (2003). Transition planning: How well does it work for young people with learning disabilities and their families? <i>British Journal of Special Education</i>, 30(3), 132-137.</b></p>
<p><b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Somewhat. By reading the article it was inferred that the goal of this research was to examine how well legislation and guidance work in relation to transition planning for young people with learning difficulties and their parents. This could have been more clearly stated in the article however.</p>
<p><b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b></p>	<p>Yes. As the research aimed to examine individuals' experiences the use qualitative methods was appropriate as they enabled the researchers to explore the participants' views and experiences.</p>
<p><b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The use of in-depth interviews enabled the researchers to develop a richer understanding of the participants' experiences of transition.</p>
<p><b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. There was some discussion about how participants were identified using questionnaires. Purposive sampling was also used to select participants to be interviewed. However, there was no mention of the inclusion/ exclusion criteria.</p>
<p><b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The use of interviews with the participants meant that the researchers were able to hear about their views, which supported the exploration of the research aims.</p>
<p><b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b></p>	<p>Yes. A description of the modifications made related to the interview materials was considered in order to meet the needs of the young people with learning difficulties. A lot of details were provided in relation to this.</p>
<p><b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b></p>	<p>Explicit mention of ethical approval or considerations associated with the study (consent, confidentiality etc.) was not provided.</p>
<p><b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b></p>	<p>Somewhat. Descriptive analysis was largely used but there was no mention of more structured methods of data analysis used in this study.</p>
<p><b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b></p>	<p>The study's findings are weaved throughout the findings/discussion chapter. It would have been helpful for the findings to be more clearly presented.</p>
<p><b>How valuable is the research?</b></p>	<p>This research has some relevance as it highlights the fact that more needs to be done to support the transition planning for this group. Useful next steps/ implications have also been provided.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Journal Title</i></p> <hr style="border: 1px solid black;"/> <p><i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i></p>	<p><b>Dee, L. (2002). ‘Am I the same?’ Decision-making processes during the transition from school. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i>, 2(2).</b></p>
<p><b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. This is included in the article.</p>
<p><b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b></p>	<p>Yes. As the purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of decision making for young people with Special Educational Needs and their families, given the implementation of the SEN CoP, the use of a qualitative approach was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to explore individuals’ experiences of this.</p>
<p><b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The use of interviews and a longitudinal design meant that the researcher was able to explore the participants’ experiences at different points in time, which supported them with being able to address the research questions.</p>
<p><b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. A description of the teachers being used to recruit participants was provided. A brief explanation was provided but no other explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria was stated.</p>
<p><b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The use of interviews with the participants meant that the researcher was able to hear about their views, which supported the exploration of the research aims.</p>
<p><b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b></p>	<p>Somewhat. A description of how interview resources were modified in order to ensure that the young people could meaningfully participate was provided. There was no discussion about issues related to how bias was accounted for.</p>
<p><b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b></p>	<p>There was no discussion regarding ethical approval or considerations regarding consent or confidentiality associated with this study.</p>
<p><b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b></p>	<p>The findings presented were largely descriptive in nature. There was no discussion about the method of analysis used in the study.</p>
<p><b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b></p>	<p>The findings and conclusions drawn have been presented clearly.</p>
<p><b>How valuable is the research?</b></p>	<p>The descriptive findings presented in this research provide some insight into the topic area. Further research should consist of a more systematic approach to analysing the data produced.</p>

<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Journal Title</i></p> <p><i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i></p>	<p><b>Tarleton, B., &amp; Ward, L. (2005). Changes and choices: finding out what information young people with learning disabilities, their parents and supporters need at transition. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i>, 33(2), 70-76.</b></p>
<p><b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The goal of the research was to examine the information needs of young people, parents and professionals during transition processes.</p>
<p><b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The use of group interviews with young people and parents enabled the researchers to explore the participants' views of what they felt they needed during transition.</p>
<p><b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. It could however be argue that the use of group interviews may have had an impact on the participants' responses and in turn the reliability of the results.</p>
<p><b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. An explanation was provided about how the participants were approached.</p>
<p><b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b></p>	<p>Yes. Measures were taken to ensure that the approach and questions used with the participants addressed the research aims/ questions. However no rationale as to why focus groups were used as the method of data collection was provided.</p>
<p><b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b></p>	<p>Yes. As this research includes the use participatory research, considerations about the researchers and the young people taking up researcher roles was considered. Attempts to acknowledge researcher bias are also evident.</p>
<p><b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b></p>	<p>Yes. At the end of the article there is a section dedicated to ethical considerations (consent, confidentiality). There is no mention of ethical approval.</p>
<p><b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b></p>	<p>Although it was mentioned that themes were identified, there was no explanation regarding the method of data analysis used to arrive at the themes.</p>
<p><b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The findings are weaved into the findings/discussion sections. A clear statement however would have been very helpful.</p>
<p><b>How valuable is the research?</b></p>	<p>This research is valuable. It provides insight into what the parents and young people felt they needed to support transition. The findings can support future policy and practice and post-16 working.</p>

<i>Journal Title</i>	<b>MacIntyre, G. (2014). The potential for inclusion: young people with learning disabilities experiences of social inclusion as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. <i>Journal of Youth Studies</i>, 17(7), 857-871.</b>
<i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i>	
<b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. The study stated a clear goal that the researchers aimed to explore.
<b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b>	Yes. As this study wanted to explore the firsthand (subjective) experiences of young people, the use of qualitative research was appropriate.
<b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. The use of in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to develop a richer understanding of the participants' experiences of transition.
<b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b>	Yes. Some information is provided about this in the article, but there is no mention of the inclusion/ exclusion criteria used.
<b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b>	Yes. The use of interviews allowed the researcher to explore the research aims. Modifications were made in order to ensure that the interviews were accessible were discussed in this article.
<b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b>	Yes. It is apparent that this has been considered. The researcher acknowledged the young peoples' needs, which were considered during the interviews so that they could access them and take part.
<b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b>	No ethical considerations were discussed in this article.
<b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b>	Somewhat. There was some mention of the method of analysis used (identification of key themes) but minimal information provided in relation to this.
<b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b>	Yes. This is presented in the discussion.
<b>How valuable is the research?</b>	This research is valuable as it offers recommendations for practice and also provides an interesting perspective on social inclusion. The study's findings are also linked to previous research and policy.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Journal Title</i></p> <p><i>Screening/ Detailed Questions</i></p>	<p><b>Murphy, E., Clegg, J., &amp; Almack, K. (2011). Constructing Adulthood in Discussions About the Futures of Young People With Moderate-Profound Intellectual Disabilities. <i>Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities</i>, 24(1), 61-73.</b></p>
<p><b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes this was clearly stated in the article.</p>
<p><b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b></p>	<p>Yes. As the aim of this study involved examining discourses linked to the rights of adults and young people with learning difficulties during transition meetings, the use of a qualitative approach enabled the authors to explore the participants' experiences.</p>
<p><b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The use of individual interviews and small discussion groups enabled the researchers to explore the participants' perspective of the area of study.</p>
<p><b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The recruitment process employed in this study was appropriate for the study. Although not explicitly mentioned it appears that purposive sampling was used. The inclusion and exclusion criteria however were not discussed.</p>
<p><b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b></p>	<p>Yes. The use of topic guides and alternative methods of communication (signing and pointing) when interacting with the young people ensured that all participants had the opportunity to express themselves during the interviews and group discussions.</p>
<p><b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b></p>	<p>Not explicitly, however there was a discussion about the use of a research team and inter-rater reliability checks, which demonstrates that reliability of the researchers' interpretations had been considered.</p>
<p><b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b></p>	<p>Yes. A discussion about ethical approval, gaining consent from the parents and the young people was provided.</p>
<p><b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b></p>	<p>Yes. An explanation regarding the method of data analysis and the coding framework and software used was provided.</p>
<p><b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b></p>	<p>Yes. A summary has been provided in the discussion section regarding the overall findings.</p>
<p><b>How valuable is the research?</b></p>	<p>This research is valuable and makes a good contribution to this area of study. The authors also attempted to relate the findings to similar populations. There was however little acknowledgement of the limitations associated with the research.</p>



<i>Journal Title</i>	<b>Pilnick, A., Clegg, J., Murphy, E., &amp; Almack, K. (2011). 'Just being selfish for my own sake...': balancing the views of young adults with intellectual disabilities and their carers in transition planning. <i>The Sociological Review</i>, 59(2), 303-323.</b>
<b>Screening/ Detailed Questions</b>	
<b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. The research aimed to examine how professionals manage and reconcile the differing wishes of parents and young people during transition meetings.
<b>Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?</b>	Yes. The use of interviews and analysis of conversations during transition meetings enabled the authors to explore the process and determine how choices were made.
<b>Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b>	Yes. By employing an interactional approach it enabled the researchers to focus on interactions amongst the participants during meetings, which was the focus of the study.
<b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to aims of the research?</b>	Yes. It is clear that the participants were recruited from special schools and that staff members were used to identify them.
<b>Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b>	Yes. Given the setting (transition meetings) the data collected via tape recording of the interactions enabled the authors to explore how the participants related to each other. In doing so it could be argued that the study was ecologically valid.
<b>Has the relationship between researcher participants been adequately considered?</b>	This was not explicitly addressed. The study focused on the dynamics between participants in the meeting but no real explanation regarding the researcher's presence during the meetings and interactions with the participants.
<b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b>	Yes. References were made regarding gaining ethical approval, issues linked to confidentiality, consent from participants and providing them with clear information about the research.
<b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b>	Yes. A description of the method of analysis used (conversation analysis) was provided, which described how the data was analysed and the themes were identified.
<b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b>	Yes. This is presented in the results and conclusion sections.
<b>How valuable is the research?</b>	Yes. This study highlights that practice appeared to differ from policy and that the decision and choice making for young people seems to be guided by parents' views. This research also provides insight into the experiences of professionals and how they negotiate parent-young person input and provides possible implications for future practice.

## Appendix 6 - Themes identified across the studies in the Systematic Literature Review

<b>Theme:</b> <i>Transition Planning</i>	<b>Theme</b> <i>Experiences of transition process for Young People with SEN and parents/ carers</i>	<b>Theme</b> <i>Involvement/ Choices and Decision-Making/ options</i>	<b>Theme</b> <i>Future Aspirations</i>	<b>Theme</b> <i>Emotional Experiences of post-school transition</i>	<b>Theme</b> <i>Information Needs</i>	<b>Theme</b> <i>Support during post school transition</i>
Tarleton & Ward (2005)	Tarleton & Ward (2005)	Maddison & Beresford (2012)	Smyth & McConkey (2003)	Maddison & Beresford (2012)	Maddison & Beresford (2012)	Gillan & Coughlan (2010)
Heslop & Abbott (2008)	Maddison & Beresford (2012)	Gillan & Coughlan (2010)	MacIntyre (2014)	Tarleton & Ward (2005)	Tarleton & Ward (2005)	Heslop & Abbott (2008)
Ward et al, (2003)	Gillan & Coughlan (2010)	Tarleton & Ward (2005)		Gillan & Coughlan (2010)	Gillan & Coughlan (2010)	Ward et al, (2003)
Gillan & Coughlan (2010)	MacIntyre (2014)	Heslop & Abbott (2008)		Heslop & Abbott (2007)	Heslop & Abbott (2008)	Heslop & Abbott (2007)
Dee (2002)	Murphy et al (2010)	Ward et al, (2003)			Dee (2002)	Maddison & Beresford (2012)
		Dee (2002)			Ward et al, (2003)	
		Pilnick et al (2011)			Heslop & Abbott (2007)	
		Murphy et al (2010)				
		Smyth & McConkey (2003)				

## Appendix 7.1 – Research Information Sheet: Parents/ Carers

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
Child, Community & Educational Psychology  
Department  
[M4 Doctoral Research Thesis]  
120 Belsize Lane  
London NW3

The Tavistock and Portman   
NHS Foundation Trust

### Parent/ Carer Information Sheet:

**Title:** Moving on: An exploratory study of the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/ carers during post-16 educational transition.

#### **The Researcher:**

My name is Tanisha Esbrand and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently working with \*\*\* Council.

#### **The Purpose of the Research:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of young people with moderate learning difficulties and their parents/carers, during their transition to post-16 educational provision.

In particular I am interested in how this group of young people feel they have been included in decision-making related to post-16 transition planning, if their views are sought and taken into account when decisions are made about their future and whether or not they believe the transition process has been successful in meeting their needs. I am also interested in how you as a parent/carer feel you have been involved in the transition planning process, whether you believe your son/daughter's views and your own have been acknowledged and if you believe that the transition process has contributed to a successful transition into post-16 provision for your son/ daughter.

#### **Do I have to take part in this research?**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to decide whether or not you take part in this research.

You have been approached to take part in this research because your son or daughter is a young person with identified special educational needs that will be transitioning onto post-16 educational provision and so your views about your experience of their transition process are valuable and would make a significant contribution to this area of study

**What will my participation involve?**

If you decide to be a part of this study your participation will involve two individual interviews (the first will take place towards the end of your son/ daughter's final term at their current school and the second interview will take place once they have transitioned to their new college during the first half of the autumn term). Each interview will approximately last up to 75 minutes. You will be asked about your experience of your son/ daughter's transition process (planning, involvement, decision making and the emotional impact of leaving school). The interviews will be voice recorded for later analysis. Once the interview data has been transcribed the researcher will explore all of the transcripts in order to identify themes that may have arisen. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be required to read the information sheet and complete the consent form.

**Your son's/ daughter's participation:**

Your son/ daughter will be required to take part in two individual interviews that will be carried out towards the end of their final term at their current school and post-transition during the first autumn half term at their new college. The interviews will explore the young peoples' experiences of the transition process (planning, involvement, decision making and the emotional impact) in an attempt to contribute to the understanding of such experiences.

Although your son/ daughter is old enough to consent to taking part in this research, I respect the fact that you continue to play a huge role in helping them to make decisions. Therefore once you have spoken to your son/ daughter about the research and feel happy for them to participate, I will approach them to obtain their informed consent.

The interviews will be voice recorded and approximately take up to 75 minutes to complete depending on the needs of the young people (e.g. speed of communication, levels of attention, concentration and behavioural needs). Comfort breaks will be negotiated with the young people and parent/ carers before the interviews start.

**Are there any potential benefits of taking part in this research?**

Involving young people with learning difficulties and parents/ carers in this research will provide you with the opportunity to talk about your experiences during an important time in your son/ daughter's and your own lives and the potential to effect change in school and transition policies, which can ultimately have an impact on the lives of other young people. Your son/ daughter's participation may also contribute to a development in their self-confidence and communication skills with others.

**Ethics Committee Clearance:**

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust.

**Will your participation in this research remain confidential?**

As the number of participants taking part in this study will be small the researcher will ensure that while recording the interviews, all names or any other identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report including the analysed data. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym (false name). Confidentiality will be maintained and the anonymity of individuals, data, schools and settings will be protected (subject to legal limitations).

**What will happen if you decide you no longer want to participate in this research?**

If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview session you have the right to decline to answer any of the questions or to end the interview. You also have the right to withdraw your interview data from the research up until the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015, as they will be transcribed for analysis.

**Potential Risks:**

It is not envisaged that your participation in this research will cause any harm to you, however, due to the nature of the research purpose, which encourages you to explore your personal experiences of the transition process, there is the possibility that this may trigger unpleasant memories or experiences, which could potentially upset you. In order to resolve this the researcher will ensure that once all interviews are finished all participants will be debriefed about their participation and will be given the opportunity to discuss their experience and to ask any questions or address any concerns they have about the research.

**Who is responsible for organising and overseeing this research?**

This study will be completed as part of my professional training and Doctorate in Child, Educational and Community Psychology in order to practice as a qualified Educational Psychologist. My research supervisor Dr Brian Davis (Course Director) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust will oversee my research activity.

**What will happen to the data collected in this study?**

The interviews conducted with the young people and their parents/carers will be analysed and published in my Doctoral Thesis. It will be marked by examiners and the results will be shared with \*\*\* Council's Educational psychology Service during a research presentation. The findings will also be shared with \*\*\* School and you will be provided with a report of the findings. The thesis will also be available for members of the public to read in at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Library. All data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy (1998).

**Further information:**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Tanisha Esbrand at \*\*\* Council Educational Psychology Service on [TEsbrand@tavistockandportman.nhs.uk](mailto:TEsbrand@tavistockandportman.nhs.uk) or 07\*\*\*\*\*. Alternatively if you have any concerns about the

conduct of the investigator or any other aspect of this research project, you can contact Louis Taussig, (Trust Quality Assurance Officer) at [ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

**Thank you**

## Appendix 7.2 – Research Information Sheet: Parents/ Carers (Easy Read Format)

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
Child, Community & Educational Psychology  
Department  
[M4 Doctoral Research Thesis]  
120 Belsize Lane, London NW3

The Tavistock and Portman   
NHS Foundation Trust

### Parent/ Carer Information Sheet

*Moving to college: Looking at the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/ carers*



My name is Tanisha Esbrand. I work with children, young people and their families as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am also a researcher who is interested in hearing about the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/carers as they prepare to leave \*\*\* School to move to \*\*\* College.

I am interested in this because moving from school to college is a very important time for young people with learning difficulties and their families and I would like to know how you as parents/carers have been involved in making decisions about your son/daughter's future.

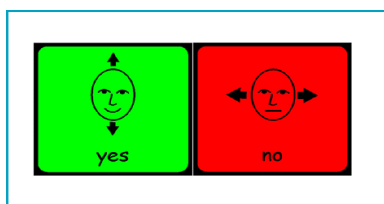
PICTURE OF THE CURRENT SCHOOL



PICTURE OF COLLEGE



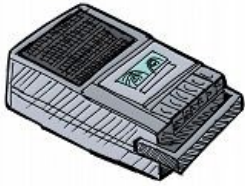
I would like to talk to you about your experiences of being involved in getting your son/daughter ready for their move to college and if you felt that you and your child were able to make important decisions related to this. I would also like to hear about how you feel about your child leaving their school. Once your son/daughter has moved to their new college I would like to talk to you again to hear how their new course is going and the support both you and your child received in order to settle into the new college.



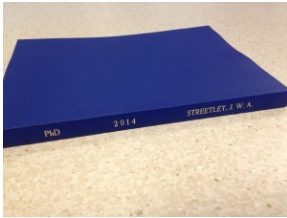
You can choose if you want to talk to me or not. If you choose not to it is OK.



We will talk to each other for up to 75 minutes. You will have breaks during this time.



I will record our interviews so that I can listen to it again when I write about it. Only I will listen to it.



I will write about what you and your son/daughter said and put it in a book so that other people can learn about your experience.



When I write about what you have told me I will not tell anyone that you said it unless you tell me about yourself or another person being harmed.



If you do not want to answer any questions or you change your mind about talking to me you can stop the interview at any time. You can also remove your interview data from this research up until 30th October 2015.



If you have any questions about the research please contact me on [TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk) or 07\*\*\*\*\*. Thank you



## Appendix 7.3 – Research Information Sheet: Young People

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
Child, Community & Educational Psychology  
Department  
[M4 Doctoral Research Thesis]  
120 Belsize Lane  
London NW3

The Tavistock and Portman   
NHS Foundation Trust

### Young Person's Information Sheet

*Moving to college: Looking at the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/ carers*



My name is Tanisha Esbrand. I work with children, young people and their families as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am also a researcher who is interested in hearing about the experiences of young people with learning difficulties as they prepare to leave school to move to \*\*\* College.

I am interested in this because moving from school to college is a very important time for young people with learning difficulties and I would like to know how you and your parents/ carers have been involved in making decisions about your future.

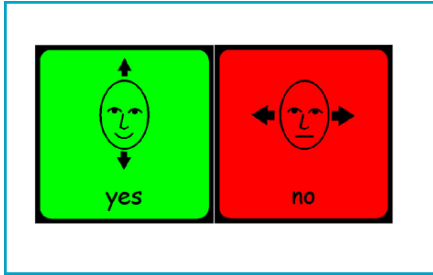
PICTURE OF THE CURRENT SCHOOL



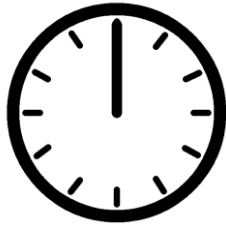
PICTURE OF COLLEGE



I would like to talk to you at your school to hear about how you feel about leaving school, what you would like to do at college and how your school is helping you to achieve this. I would also like to talk to you again when you start college to hear about how your new course is going and the support you have received to settle in.



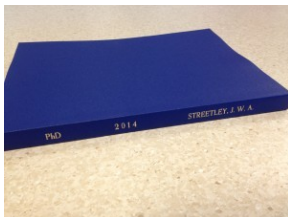
You can choose if you want to talk to me or not. If you choose not to it is ok.



We will talk to each other for up to 75 minutes. You will have breaks during this time.



I will record our interviews so that I can listen to it again when I write about it. Only I will listen to it.



I will write about what you said report and put it in a book so that other people can learn about your experience.



When I write about what you have told me I will not tell anyone that you said it unless you tell me about yourself or another person being harmed.

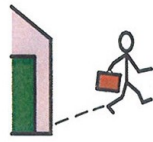


If you do not want to answer any questions or you change your mind about talking to me you can stop the interview at any time. You can also remove your interview data from this research up until 30th October 2015.



If you have any questions about the research please contact me on [TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk) or 0\*\*\*\*\*. Thank you.

Appendix 7.4– Research Information Sheet: Young people (symbols)



# Leaving School



=



My name is Tanisha and I work with



children and young people.



I would like to talk to you about how you are

—



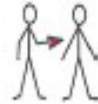
being prepared and helped for when you



leave school.



I would like to know what you would like to do



when you leave school.



I would like to hear if your school has asked



you what you would like to do when you



leave school.



We will talk about this during an interview and it



will be





It will be very exciting to hear about your views.



I will write about your interview for my project and it



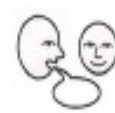
will be marked by an examiner.



When I write about what you have said i Will not



tell anyone that you said it.



You can choose if you want to talk to the



researcher. It is ok to say NO.



If you have any questions about the



research you can call or email Tanisha.

## Appendix 8.1 – Research Consent Form: Parent/ Carers

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
Child, Community & Educational Psychology  
Department  
[M4 Doctoral Research Thesis]  
120 Belsize Lane  
London NW3

The Tavistock and Portman   
NHS Foundation Trust

### Parent/ Carer Consent Form

**Title:** Moving on: An exploratory study of the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/ carers during post-school educational transition.

**Researcher:** Tanisha Esbrand (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Please read the following statements and, if you agree, initial the corresponding box to confirm agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions, which have been answered by the researcher.

Initials

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data and myself at any time before 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015. If I decide to withdraw after 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015 I understand that it will be too late to remove my data from the research. I understand that my data will be treated confidentially and any publication resulting from this work will report only anonymised data. The only exception to this is if there is any disclosure of harm to self and/or others.

I understand that my responses during the interviews will be tape recorded for transcription at a later date. Once analysed the data generated will be published in a Doctoral Thesis and will be retained in accordance with the Tavistock and Portman's Data Protection Policy (1998).

I agree to take part in the above research.

### Signatures:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

If you would like a copy of this consent form to keep, please ask the researcher.

Researcher's contact details: [TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk) ; 07\*\*\*\*\*

If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these, in writing to Louis Taussig, (Trust Quality Assurance Officer) at [ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.



## Appendix 8.2 – Research Consent Form: Parent/ Carers (Easy Read)

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
Child, Community & Educational Psychology  
Department  
[M4 Doctoral Research Thesis]  
120 Belsize Lane  
London NW3

The Tavistock and Portman   
NHS Foundation Trust

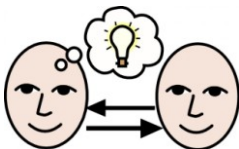
### Parent/ Carer Consent Sheet: *Moving to college: Looking at the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/ carers*

**Researcher:** Tanisha Esbrand (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Please read the following statements and if you agree with them write your initials in the boxes.



I read the information sheet about the research and understand what the research is about.



I asked Tanisha questions about the research and she has answered them.



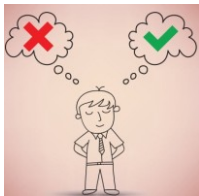
I understand that I will be recorded during my interviews.



When my interviews are written about nobody will know that I said it.

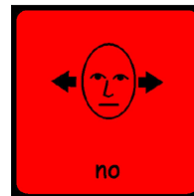
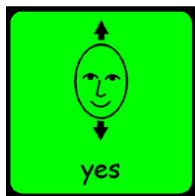


I can choose whether I take part in the study or not. I can stop the interviews if I do not want to continue at any time.



I can change my mind about being in the research and do not have to give her a reason why. I can also remove my interview data from this research up until 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015 if I choose to.

I would like to be in this research and take part in the interview (please circle)



**Signatures:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant  
(block capitals)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher (block  
capitals)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature



If you have any questions about the research please contact me on [TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk) or 07xxxxxxx.  
**Thank you**

## Appendix 8.3 – Research Consent Form: Young People

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
Child, Community & Educational Psychology  
Department  
[M4 Doctoral Research Thesis]  
120 Belsize Lane  
London NW3

The Tavistock and Portman   
NHS Foundation Trust

### Young Person's Consent sheet

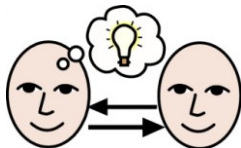
#### ***Moving to college: Looking at the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/ carers – Consent Sheet***

**Researcher:** Tanisha Esbrand (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Please read the following statements and if you agree with them write your initials in the boxes.



I read the information sheet about the research and understand what the research is about.



I asked Tanisha questions about the research and she has answered them.



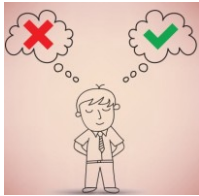
I understand that I will be recorded during my interviews.



When my interviews are written about nobody will know that I said it.

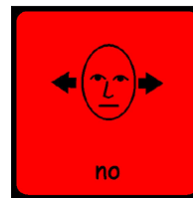
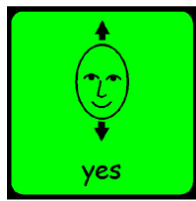


I can choose whether I take part in the study or not. I can stop the interviews if I do not want to continue at any time.



I can change my mind about being in the research and do not have to give her a reason why. I can also remove my interview data from this research up until 30th October 2015 if I choose to.

I would like to be in this research and take part in two interviews (please circle)



**Signatures:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant  
(block capitals)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher (block  
capitals)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

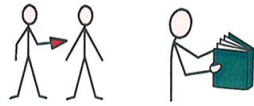


If you have any questions about the research please contact me on [TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk](mailto:TEsbrand@tavi-port.nhs.uk) or 07\*\*\*\*\*.  
**Thank you**

Appendix 8.4 – Research Consent Forms: Young People (Symbols)



# Leaving School



Have you read the



information sheet?



YES



NO



Did Tanisha talk to you



about the research?



YES



NO



Are you happy to be





while we talk to each other?





YES




NO

Do you understand you can



stop helping with the




study at any time?

  
 YES

  
 NO

Are you happy to take



part in the study?

  
 YES

  
 NO

  
 NAME .....

## Appendix 9.1 – Research Interview Guide: Young People

### Interview One

#### **Warm up activities:**

I will ask the young person to talk what they like to do when they are at home (play games etc.) I will ask them to share this with me, explain to me (e.g. show me how to play, join in with their play etc.) in order to build a rapport with them and to reduce any anxiety that they may have about meeting me and taking part in the interview.

#### **Introduction:**

- Share and talk through the ‘Young Person’s Information Sheet’ and ‘Young Person’s Consent Form’. Provide the young person with the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
- Remind the young person that the interviews will be voice recorded and that they have the right to withdraw from the interviews at any time.

*Thank you once again for agreeing to take part in this research. Your participation is valued and very much appreciated. As you know we will be talking about your experiences as a young person who is getting ready to leave school.*

#### **General Information about you:**

##### Can you tell me about yourself?

##### Possible Prompts:

- What (kind of things) do you like to do when you are at home/school? Why?
- What do you think you are good at?
- What is really important to you? Why?
- Think about all of the people you know (family, friends, and teachers) who is important to you? Why do you think that is?

#### **Experiences of Special Educational Needs:**

##### Who helps you?

##### Possible Prompts:

- Do you need help with your learning (at home or school?) Who helps you?
- Do you need help with anything else at \*\*\* School? Who helps you?

#### **Experiences of school:**

##### How old were you when you started going to \*\*\* School?

##### Possible Prompts:

- How long have you been at your school?
- What year/ class were you in when you first came to this school?

##### Do you like this school? Why?

##### Possible Prompts:

- What do you like doing at school?
- What subjects/ lessons did you enjoy doing at school? Why?
- What subjects/ lessons did you not enjoy doing? Why?

##### Do you have friends at \*\*\* School?

##### Possible Prompts:

- Tell me about them
- How long have you known them?
- What do you like to do with them?
- Do you see them a lot in school? (Are you in the same class)

How do you feel about your teachers and teaching assistants at \*\*\* School? (Why?)

Possible Prompts:

- How long have you known them for?
- Do you have a favourite teacher/ adult? Who is it? Why?

Who helps you at school?

Prompt:

- What do they help you with?
- Do you like it when they help you? (Why?)

What have been some of your best times at \*\*\* School? (Why?)

Prompt:

- How did they make you feel?

**Leaving school:**

Do you think anything will change when you leave \*\*\* School? How does this make you feel? Why?

Has anyone talked to you about the changes that might happen? What was said?

You have been at \*\*\* School for \_\_ years. Now that you are \_\_ years old and have to leave your school, how do you feel? Why?

Possible Prompts:

- How do you feel about saying goodbye to your teachers at \*\*\* School?
- How do you feel about saying goodbye to your friends at \*\*\* School?
- Has any talked to you about what it will be like to leave your school? Who? What did they say?
- Has any helped you to think about what you might do when you leave school? Tell me more
- Did they ask you what you'd like to do when you leave \*\*\* School?
- What will you be doing when you leave school? (Studying, employment etc.)Where?
- How do you feel about leaving \*\*\* School and moving to college?
- Are you looking forward to moving to college? Why?
- Is there anything you are not looking forward to? Why? Is there anyone that can help you with this?
- What is the best/worst thing about leaving school?

**Transition experiences and preparation for your move to post-school provision:**

Do you think \*\*\* School helped you to get ready for your move to college? How?

Possible Prompts:

- Did anyone (parents, teachers) talk to you about moving to college? What did you talk about?
- Did anyone talk to your parents about moving to college? Do you know what was said?



- Did you have any lessons at school where you talked about what you could do when you left school? What did you do in the lesson(s)?
- What kinds of things did the teachers do with you to help you get ready?
- Did you do any Work experience? What did you do? Did you choose to do that? Why?
- Did you visit the college before you started to go there? Who did you go with?
- Have you talked to a careers advisor about what you would like to do when you leave school?

### Have you talked to mum or dad about leaving school?

Prompt:

- Have you ever talked about what you would like to do at college?

### Tell me about the time you spent at \*\*\* College? (part-time placement)

Possible Prompts:

- When you first went to visit the college how did you feel (excited, nervous etc.?) (Why?)
- When you first went to visit the college what did you think of it? (Why?)
- How often did you go there?
- What did you do when you were there?
- How did you feel about going there?
- What did you enjoy most about going there?
- Did you find anything difficult when you went there?

### Transition Planning

*Possible Prompts:*

- Did anyone ask you what you want to do when you leave school?
- Do you think people listened to you when you talked about what you want to do when you leave school?

### Do you know what an Annual review meeting is? Did you attend one when you were in year 9 or any other year? How was it?

*Possible Prompts:*

- Have you been to any other meetings at school about leaving school? Who was at the meeting?
- Who was there?
- What was the meeting about?
- Did you get the chance to talk about what you would like to do when you leave the \*\*\*School at the meeting?
- Did the adults in the meeting listen to you talk about what you want to do?
- Did anyone talk about your targets for when you leave school? What were some of your targets?
- Do you think your school has helped you to get ready for your move to college? How?
- Do you think your school has listened to you talk about what you would like to do in the future? Why?
- Have the meetings helped you to think about what you want to do in the future?

### Are you ready to move to college? Why?

Prompt:

- What will you be doing at your new college?
- Do you think you will need support at your new college?

- What type of support? (help moving around the building etc.)
- Have you shared this information with anyone? (parent/carers, school staff...)

**Adulthood and Future Aspirations:**

Now that you have left school how do you feel about this? (happy, sad etc. ?)

Do you feel ready to leave the \*\*\*School to go to college? (Why?)

Possible Prompts:

- What are your hopes for your future?
- If you could choose anything, what would you like to do when you leave school? Why?
- What will you be going on to do at college?
- Is this what you wanted to do? Who decided that you would do \_\_\_\_\_ at college? How do you feel about this?
- Has anyone talked to you about your future? (e.g. Being an adult, making choices and decisions, relationships, independent living, employment etc.)
- What would you like to do after college?
- How do you feel now that you have left school?

**Areas for improvement:**

Do you think there is anything that The \*\*\*School could have done to help you more with getting ready to move to college?

## Appendix 9.2 – Research Interview Guide: Parent/ Carers

### Interview One

- Share and talk through the ‘Parent Information Sheet’ and ‘Parent Consent Form’.  
Provide the parents/ carers with the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
- Remind the parents/ carers that the interviews will be voice recorded and that they have the right to withdraw from the interviews at any time.

#### ***Introduction:***

*Thank you once again for agreeing to take part in this research. Your participation is valued and very much appreciated. As you know we will be talking about your experiences as a parent/ carer supporting your son/ daughter through their post-16 educational transition to college.*

#### **General Information about the young person:**

**Can you tell me about your son/ daughter?**

##### Possible Prompts:

- What is their personality like?
- What are their interests/ hobbies?
- What are his/ her favourite things to do at home/school?
- What is he/she good at?
- What does he/ she find difficult?
- What is important to them? Why?
- Who is important to them? Why?

#### **Experiences of Special Educational Needs:**

**What are your son/ daughter’s identified special educational needs/ learning difficulties?**

##### Possible Prompts:

- Thinking back to when you first received a diagnosis, how did you and your family feel? What were your responses to finding out that your child had special educational needs/ learning difficulties?
- What was your understanding of your son/daughter’s needs after they had been explained to you?
- Did this have an impact on you and your family? How did you and your family feel?

#### **Experiences of school:**

**Can you tell me about your son/ daughter’s educational journey up until now?**

##### Possible Prompts:

- Looking back to when your son/daughter was 3 years old, did you think about what school they might be going to? If so, what were your thoughts about the type of school you wanted them to go to? Why?
- How long have they attended \*\*\*School for?
- Why did you choose this school?
- What has been your son/ daughter’s experience at \*\*\*School? (Positive/ negative?) Why?
- Did your son/ daughter enjoy going to school? Why do you think this is?
- Has your son/daughter developed relationships with other pupils and staff members? What were these like? (Positive/ negative?)
- What subjects/ lessons did they enjoy doing at school? Why?

- What subjects/ lessons did they not enjoy doing? Why?
- What support did your son/daughter receive at school? Has this support been beneficial?
- As a parent/ carer, what has been your experience of (young person's name) attending \*\*\*School? Why
- Do you feel that this school has met your son/ daughter's needs? How?
- What do you think has been some of (young person's name) achievements during his/ her time at \*\*\*School? How does/ did this make you feel?

**Leaving school and beyond:**

Leaving school is a major life event for a child and young person. When did you first start thinking about the idea/ prospect that (young person's name) would be leaving \*\*\*School? Why?

*Possible Prompts:*

- How did this make you feel? Why?
- Now that the time has come for (young person's name) to leave his/her school, how does this make you feel? Why?
- As (young person's name) has been at \*\*\*School since he/she was \_\_ years old how do you think he/she will feel about leaving? Why?
- Do you have any worries or concerns about your son/ daughter leaving \*\*\*School? (Familiar routines, familiar teachers, staff members, peers?) What are you most concerned about? Why?
- How do you think (young person's name) feels about this? Why?
- Did you need support to think about the idea of your son/daughter leaving school? If so what support and who provided it?
- Did you find the support useful? Why?
- What options did you consider when thinking about where your son/daughter would go after leaving school? Why?
- Did you talk to your son/daughter about the prospect of moving on to a different setting? How did you do this? Do you think your son/daughter understood this?

**Transition experiences and preparation for the young person's move to post-16 provision:**

What kind of support was offered to your son/ daughter while they were still at school in order to prepare them for their upcoming transition?

*Possible Prompts:*

- What has \*\*\*School done to help your son/ daughter get ready for your move to college? (Work experience, college link visits, self-help skills, independence, careers advice etc.)
- Were they effective/ useful? Why?
- Who was involved? (Members of staff, agencies etc.)
- Did you feel included by the school in preparing your son/daughter for their move?
- Were your views listened to? Why?
- Did your son/ daughter have an Annual review in year 9? Were you invited? Did you attend? What did you discuss?
- Did you feel like your views were being considered during the meeting? Why?
- Do you think your son/daughter's views were considered during the meeting? Why?
- Do you feel that staff members actively tried to find out what your son/daughter's views about their future were? How?
- Were you and your son/daughter supported during the Annual Review process? What information were you provided with? By whom?
- Has this support been useful? Why?

- What information were you provided with about \*\*\* College?
- How has your son/daughter's visits to \*\*\* College prepared them for their move to college in September?

**Transition Planning and support (school and external agencies):**

**When did your son/ daughter's transition planning first start?**

*Possible Prompts:*

- Did you approach school to start thinking about the process or did school contact you?
- What did the transition planning consist of? (Meetings, Annual reviews, Person Centred Planning meetings etc.)
- Did you feel involved in the process (meetings etc.)
- Do you feel your son/daughter was involved in the process?
- What support did you receive during the process?
- What support did your son/ daughter receive during the process? (Transition visits etc.)
- What was your role in this planning?
- What was your son/ daughter's role in this planning?
- Have you received any other help with the transition planning?
- Has your son/ daughter received any other support with the transition planning process?
- Have you experienced any difficulties finding or accessing support or services while planning for (young person's name) move to college? Why?

**Did you feel involved in the transition process? (Decision-making etc.)**

*Possible Prompts:*

- Do you think your views were sought during your son/daughter's transition process? Why?
- Do you think your views were listened to during your son/daughter's transition process? Why?
- Do you think your son/ daughter's views/ aspirations were sought during their transition process? Why?
- Do you think your son/ daughter's views/ aspirations were listened to during your son/daughter's transition process?
- Did you feel like a partner in the entire process? Why?

**Person-centred planning experiences:**

**Were you invited/ involved in your son/ daughter's person-centred planning meeting? What was your experience of this?**

*Possible Prompts:*

- Were you invited to a review meeting? Did you attend? Why?
- What did the meeting consist of?
- Who attended the meeting?
- What was discussed during the meeting?
- Did you have the opportunity to actively take part in the meeting? How?
- Did your son/ daughter have the opportunity to take part in the meeting? How?
- Did you feel listened to during the meeting? Why?
- Do you think that your son/daughter's views were listened to during the meeting? Why?
- Do you know what the outcomes of the review were? If so what?

- Do you feel your son/ daughter understood what the outcomes of the meeting were? Why?
- How did the school or external agencies include you and your son/ daughter's views into the meeting?
- Were any targets/ goals set as a result of the meeting?
- Have they been shared with you and your son/ daughter?

### **Adulthood and Future Aspirations:**

**Do you feel your son/daughter is prepared for adulthood? Why? How?**

#### *Possible Prompts:*

- What are your hopes for your son/daughter?
- Do you know whether or not your son/daughter is looking forward to leaving school to move to college? Why?
- What would your son/daughter like to do when they leave school? (College course, employment etc.)
- Have you had any discussions about the future with your son/ daughter? If so what have you talked about? (Being an adult, making choices and decisions, relationships, independent living, employment etc.)
- Have these discussions been easy or difficult? Why?
- What will your son/ daughter be doing when they go to college in September? Is this what they wanted to do? How do you know?
- In your opinion, what would be the ideal situation for your son/daughter when they leave school? Why?
- How was the college and course decided? Were you involved in this decision-making?
- Was your son/daughter involved in the decision-making? How?
- Do you think your son/ daughter's college course is related to what he or she has said they want to do when they leave school?
- Do you as a parent feel your son/ daughter is well prepared to move to college? Why?
- Do you think anything may change for you as a parent now that your son/daughter has left school? How? Why?
- How are you feeling now that your son/daughter has officially left school?
- How does your son/daughter now feel that they have left school for good after being there for \_\_ years?

### **Areas for improvement:**

**Looking back on your experiences of the transition planning, person-centred meetings etc. College link visits etc. Do you feel anything could have been done differently to support the process better for you or your son/ daughter?**

#### *Possible Prompts:*

- Do you think the \*\*\*School could have done more in order to support you? What? How?
- If you could change two things from the process what would they be? Why?
- Is there anything that you would like to have known or had more information about that would have helped you or your son/daughter during the process?

Now that your son/ daughter has left school how do you feel about this?

- Now that your child has left school do you feel you received enough support during the entire process?

### **Appendix 9.3 – Follow Up Research Interview Guide: Young People**

- How is college? Do you like/ dislike it? Why?
- What do/don't you like about college? Why?  
(**Prompt** - What are your favourite things to do at college?)
- Have you made any new friends at college?
- Now that you have left XXX School how do you feel? Why?
- Do you remember the meetings that you had at XXX school about moving to college?
- Do you think that your teachers and mum/dad listened to you during the meetings?  
How do you know?
- What course are you doing at college now?
- Did you get to choose the course that you are doing at college?

*In addition to these questions each of the participants were asked individualised questions based on their responses during to their first interviews in order to explore if they felt the same way about what they had said or if their views had changed.*

## **Appendix 9.4 – Follow Up Research Interview Guide: Parent/ Carers**

- How has your son/daughter's experience at college been so far?
- Looking back on the experience, how well do you feel your son/ daughter's views were sought/ listened to during the transition process? (e.g. during meetings, making decisions etc.)
- Looking back on your experience, how well do you feel your views were sought/ listened to during the transition process? (e.g. during meetings, making decisions etc.)
- Did you feel involved in the transition process? Why?
- Do you think you son/daughter was fully involved in the transition process? Why?
- Did you receive support during the process?
- (If so) Do you feel that the support you received from his/her school and the college had an impact on XXX's transition?
  - Was it helpful/ unhelpful?
  - Did the process meet the needs of your son/ daughter
- Do you think your son/ daughter was prepared for their move to college?
- How do you feel about XXX going to college since they have moved from XXX school?
- How do you think XXX feels about going to college since leaving school?

***In addition to these questions each of the participants were asked individualised questions based on their responses during to their first interviews in order to explore if they felt the same way about what they had said or if their views had changed.***



## Appendix 10 – Ethical Approval

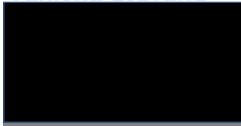
The Tavistock and Portman 

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Tanisha Esbrand



06<sup>th</sup> July 2015

**Re: Research Ethics Application**

Title: *"Moving on: A multi-perspective, exploratory study of the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/carers during post-16 educational transition"*

Dear Tanisha,

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

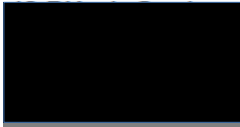
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louis Taussig'.

Louis Taussig  
Secretary to the Trust Research Ethics Committee

Cc Brian Davis

06.01.2016

Tanisha Esbrand



By email

Dear Ms Esbrand,

**Re: Research Ethics Application**

*Title: "Moving on: A multi-perspective, exploratory study of the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and their parents/carers during post-16 educational transition"*

I am pleased to inform you that the Trust Research Ethics Committee formally approved your application on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

Please note that I am copying this communication to your supervisor for information.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Paru Jeram'.

**Mrs Paru Jeram**  
Secretary to the Trust Research Ethics Committee

Cc. Brian Davis

**Appendix 11 – Extract of a young person’s interview transcript including analytical notes**

<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Original Transcript</b> (R: Researcher, Ricky)	<b>Exploratory Comments</b> Key: Descriptive; <i>Linguistic</i> ; <u>Conceptual</u>
Belonging	<p><i>Pre-Transition Interview</i></p> <p>1. R: So how old were you when you first went to Willow School?</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3. Ricky: I think I was five, yeah, <u>I been there for 13 years so...</u></p> <p>4.</p> <p>5. R: OK that's a long time</p> <p>6.</p> <p>7. Ricky: yeah</p> <p>8.</p> <p>9. R: So do you remember your first teacher?</p> <p>10.</p> <p>11. Ricky: yeah</p> <p>12.</p> <p>13. R: What was his or her name?</p> <p>14.</p> <p>15. Ricky: Ms Kan uh Ms Dune She changed her name she got</p> <p>16. married</p> <p>17.</p> <p>18. R: Is she still there now?</p> <p>19.</p> <p>20. Ricky: Yeah</p> <p>21.</p> <p>22. R: Do you still see her?</p>	Knowledge of how long he has been there.

Significant aspect of life	<p>23. 24. Ricky: yeah 25. 26. R: OK. So do you like the Willow School? 27. 28. Ricky: Yeah, <u>it's been my life really, like I been there for a whole</u> 29. <u>13 years</u> 30. 31. R: OK so when you say it's been your life what do you mean? 32. Tell me more. 33.</p>	<p><i>Strong use of language.</i> School had been a big part of his life; important to him.</p>
Belonging	<p>34. Ricky: <u>You get to know everyone, you get to like eventually be</u> 35. <u>part of the school</u>, like people say “oh he’ll show you he knows 36. where everything is” 37. 38. R: OK so tell me more, do you know all of the teachers? 39.</p>	<p><u>A sense of belonging.</u> Familiarity.</p>
Saying goodbye	<p>40. Ricky: Some of them, cos some of them are quite new, cos I <u>only</u> 41. <u>left Willow School 3 weeks ago</u> 42. 43. R: OK and how do you feel about leaving? 44.</p>	<p>Mention of him leaving school early on in the discussion. Indication that it is a <u>prominent life event</u> for him.</p>
Looking forward	<p>45. Ricky: Uh quite <u>good actually cos I know I've got college to go to</u> 46. <u>and I know that it can help me more and more</u> 47. 48. R: How do you think it will help you more and more? 49.</p>	<p>Feeling good about the move because he knows what he is moving on to. <u>Practical reasons for going to college.</u></p>
Developing life skills	<p>50. Ricky: Umm like <u>life skills basically</u> 51. 52. R: What do you mean life skills?</p>	<p>He believes life skills will help him.</p>

<p>Money management</p>	<p>53. 54. Ricky: Umm <u>like money and all that</u> 55. 56. R: Is that the course you're going to be doing? 57. 58. Ricky: Uh yeah pathways 59. 60. R: OK. So do you have any friends at Willow School?</p>	<p>An area that stands out to him as needing support to deal with perhaps?</p>
<p>Friendships</p>	<p>61. 62. Ricky: yeah 63. 64. R: Tell me a bit about them 65. 66. Ricky: Uh they a bit shy and when I'm there they're nervous 67. 68. R: Were they <u>nervous</u> around you or just other people? 69. 70. Ricky: Just other people 71. 72. R: How were they with you? 73. 74. Ricky: Well put it this way <u>I brought them out of their shyness</u> 75. 76. R: Oh ok and so now they are a bit more bubbly? 77. 78. Ricky: Well no they're still shy 79. 80. R: But when you were around you brought them out of their 81. shell? 82.</p>	<p><u>Projection?</u></p> <p>He has a strong impact on them?</p>

<p>friendships</p>	<p>83. Ricky: Well tried to 84. 85. R: OK, so did your friends start school with you or after you? 86. 87. Ricky: They come after, the <u>second year they started</u> 88. 89. R: So you met them in year one? 90. 91. Ricky: No Year 2 92. 93. R: OK and how many friends did you have 94. 95. Ricky: Two 96. 97. R: OK and are they in your class now? 98.</p>	<p>Friendships have lasted a while</p>
<p>Loss</p>	<p>99. Ricky: <u>No they went to college first, one of them still at school</u> 100. 101.R: OK so do you get to see your friend a lot at school? 102. 103.Ricky: Uh a little bit 104. 105.R: Are you in the same class? 106. 107.Ricky: Same class 108. 109.R: OK so how do you feel about your teachers and the staff at 110.Willow School? Do you like them? Not like them? 111. 112.Ricky: Some of them are alright</p>	<p><u>Some experience of loss</u> – friend going off to college</p>

	<p>113.  114.R: What is it about them that makes them alright?  115.  116.Ricky: It depends how they're personality is, like with me like I'm  117.quite like, I'll talk to anyone but if people are like they don't then  118.I wont talk to them  119.  120.R: So does that mean if the teachers were talking to you then  121.you would talk to them? But if they didn't talk to you then you  122.wouldn't talk to them?  123.  124.Ricky: I would but if they were like moody yeah then I wouldn't  125.talk to them  126.  127.R: Oh OK that makes sense. And do you have a favourite teacher  128.or member of staff?  129.  130.Ricky: No  131.  132.R: OK so what have been some of your best times at Willow  133.School?  134.  135.Ricky: When we went to Thorpe Park  136.  137.R: When did you go to Thorpe Park?  138.  139.Ricky: last year  140.  141.R: Any other times that you think oh that was a really good time  142.at Willow School or times when you thought I'm really proud of</p>	<p>How he interacts with others.</p> <p>Taking others' emotions/ feelings into account.  <u>Emotional literacy</u></p> <p>Special event for him.</p>
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Endings	<p>143.myself?  144.  145.Ricky: <u>The leaving do, the prom</u>  146.  147.R: And did you enjoy it?  148.  149.Ricky: Yeah  150.  151.R: How did it make you feel being at the prom?  152.</p>	Special event – <u>mark of an ending each year.</u>
Endings	<p>153.Ricky: <u>Quite, quite sad actually cos you know that you're leaving</u>  154.  155.R: Tell me a bit more about feeling sad about leaving  156.  157.Ricky: <u>Well I was OK because I was coming back</u>, but some  158.people were like not going back and were sad about it  159.  160.R: And was that last year's prom?  161.  162.Ricky: yeah  163.  164.R: So what about, did you have a prom this year?  165.</p>	<p><u>Endings</u> – realisation that school is coming to an end.</p> <p>He didn't experience such emotions because he knew he would be going back.</p>
Endings	<p>166.Ricky: No  167.  168.R: Oh ok. So last year when people were leaving it was sad but  169.At the end of this year you are not going back so how does that  170.feel?  171.  172.Ricky: <u>I feel alright</u></p>	No prom – how were endings dealt with?



<p>Friendships</p>	<p>173. 174.R: OK, so do you think anything will change when you leave 175.the Willow School? Because before you went to college three 176.days a week and to school two days, but now you won't be going 177.back to school again. 178. 179.Ricky: <u>Make more friends actually</u> 180. 181.R: Make more friends where? 182. 183.Ricky: At college 184. 185.R: OK anything else you think is gonna change? 186.</p>	<p>The hope that college will mean developing new friendships.</p>
<p>Adjustment to change</p>	<p>187.Ricky: Uh teachers and tutors, its gone from teachers to tutors 188.now 189. 190.R: Oh so you don't call them tutors anymore? 191. 192.Ricky: Yeah 193. 194.R:OK SO how do you feel about making more friends and having 195.tutors? 196.</p>	<p>Changes in staff→ teachers to tutors</p>
<p>Adjusting to change</p>	<p>197.Ricky: <u>Quite good actually</u> cos you can't always (pause), you 198.can't always uh (long pause) <u>you can't always be at Willow</u> 199.<u>School, you need to move on and its good for a change</u> 200. 201.R: OK and has anyone talked to you about the changes that 202.might happen?</p>	<p>Positive about his move from school. Recognition that it isn't possible to stay at school. <u>Acceptance.</u></p>

<p>Support to think about the future</p>	<p>203. 204.Ricky: Yeah 205. 206.R: Who was that 207. 208.Ricky: <u>The tutor from last year</u> 209. 210.R: At 'A' College: 211. 212.Ricky: Yeah 213. 214.R: OK and was it a man or a woman? 215. 216.Ricky: A woman 217. 218.R: And what did she say 219.</p>	<p>Engaged in discussions about moving to college and leaving school.</p>
<p>Support to think about the future</p>	<p>220.Ricky: She said <u>its gonna be all different but not to worry</u> 221. 222.R: Uh hmm tell me a bit more about what she said and how it 223.would be different? 224.</p>	<p>Attempts to manage any anxiety that may be experienced during this time.</p>
<p>Adjusting to change</p>	<p>225.Ricky: Well cos there's a group of us in, <u>but we all wont be like</u> 226.<u>together we'll be all mixed up</u> and different hours and everything 227.<u>like we finish at different times and its more independently so you</u> 228.<u>won't get more, you will get, you still will get help but you won't</u> 229.<u>get like so much help</u></p>	<p><u>Loss</u> of familiar peers and friendships</p>
<p>Independence</p>	<p>230. 231.R: And how did you feel when she said that you have to be 232.more independent?</p>	<p>Expectations linked to more independence at college.</p>

Concerns about the future	233. 234.Ricky: <u>Quite scary</u>	Scared about having to be independent.
Learning support	235. 236.R: Quite scary? 237. 238.Ricky: <u>You've always, I've always like had someone there to</u> 239. <u>support me</u> 240. 241.R: And now you might not have that? 242. 243.Ricky: So much 244. 245.R: So much, OK so how do you think you'll get on then, not 246. <u>having so much support?</u> 247.	<u>Loss-</u> support being taken away  Acknowledgement that support will be available, just not as much.
Post-school preparation	248.Ricky: <u>I think I'll be quite good cos we did a taster day in year 11</u> 249. <u>and where you go and try out the things and it was quite good</u> 250. 251.R: OK that's good to hear. So you've been at the Willow School 252. for 13 years you said and now you are 17 years old and you're 253. leaving your school, how does that all feel? 254.	Preparation (e.g. visits to college) were valuable.
Emotional experience	255.Ricky: Quite good 256. 257.R: Quite good? OK so how do you feel about saying goodbye 258. to your teachers because some of the teachers at the school 259. you've known for a very long time, so how does it feel saying 260. goodbye to them? 261.	
Loss	262.Ricky: <u>Quite sad actually because its like you're going, you're</u>	<i>Emotive use of language. Self reassurance</i>

<p>Adjusting to change</p>	<p>263. <u>moving yeah and you wont see em', but you can always pop back</u>  264. and say hi  265.  266.R: Yeah? Do you think you'll pop back and say hi?  267.  268.Ricky: <u>Not for a while</u> (laugh)  269.  270.R: Why not for a while?  271.  272.Ricky: Its just that like you need, <u>you need to get like used to the</u>  273. <u>idea of going to college, if you pop back and all the time you</u>  274. <u>won't get used to being at college, you'll be like "oh I'm just</u>  275. <u>going to see Willow School"</u> and you won't get used to cos you  276. know that you'll always gonna be poppin' in there and its like  277. <u>you need to move on</u>  278.  279.R: OK so how will you feel about saying goodbye to some of  280. your friends at the Willow School?  281.  282.Ricky: Quite, cos uh eventually I know they're gonna be going to,  283. not all of them some of them will be going to Willow School  284. ummm no college so I know that I'll see em' sometimes  285.  286.R: So it's a see you later and not goodbye type of thing?  287.  288.Ricky: Yeah  289.  290.R: OK. I know you said that college has spoken to you about what  291. it would be like to come to college but has anyone talked to you  292. about what it would be like to leave school?</p>	<p>Keeping his distance may help him to move on  <u>Acceptance</u></p> <p>Difficulty articulating himself – difficult topic?  <u>Reassurance</u></p>
<p>Reassurance</p>		

<p>Aspirations Deferred goals</p>	<p>293. 294.Ricky: No 295. 296.R: So before you left the Willow School, did anyone ask you what 297.you'd like to do when you leave school? 298. 299.Ricky: Yeah 300. 301.R: Who did? 302. 303.Ricky: The head teacher 304. 305.R: And what did you say? 306. 307.Ricky: Well, <u>I said, well I'm doing life skills but after life skills I</u> 308.<u>want to do cookery</u> 309. 310.R: OK you like cooking? 311. 312.Ricky: Yeah 313. 314.R: What do you like to cook? 315. 316.Ricky: Pasta 317. 318.R: Oh pasta. So you want to do cookery when you are older? 319. 320.Ricky: Yeah 321. 322.R: So when they asked you what you wanted to do and you said</p>	<p>Less focus placed on adulthood.</p> <p>Staff members interested in future aspirations.</p> <p>He has a plan set out for his future.</p>
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<p>Encouragement</p>	<p>323.cookery what did the head teacher say?  324.  325.Ricky: <u>They said “good on you”</u>  326.  327.R: Has anyone helped you to think about what you might do, I  328.know you said you’ll be doing pathways at college but before you  329.chose life skills, did anyone ask you what you wanted to do when  330.you went to college?  331.  332.Ricky: Yeah  333.  334.R: Who asked you?  335.  336.Ricky: Uh the head teacher  337.  338.R: And you told him that you wanted to do  339.  340.Ricky: Cooking yeah  341.  342.R: OK so are you looking forward to moving to college?  343.</p>	<p>Encouragement</p>
<p>Positive about transition to college</p>	<p>344.Ricky: Yeah  345.  346.R: Yeah? Why are you looking forward to it?  347.</p>	<p>Aspirations.</p>
<p>Growing up</p>	<p>348.Ricky: Uh <u>I’m looking forward to it because it means you’re older</u>  349.<u>now and you’re getting, its something to do at the end of the day</u>  350.  351.R: So you said it means you’re older, how does it feel being more  352.older?</p>	<p>Maturity  Keeping busy/ preoccupied during the day</p>

Moving towards adulthood	353. 354.Ricky: <u>Good.</u>	
Increased responsibilities	355. 356.R: Yeah? What does being older mean to you? 357. 358.Ricky: You get more, you get more like, <u>you get more like more</u> 359. <u>responsibilities</u>	Leaving school and going to college means increased responsibilities
Reduced supervision	360. 361.R: OK what kinds of responsibilities? 362. 363.Ricky: <u>Like going out to town on your own</u>	
Reduced supervision	364. 365.R: OK and have you been out to town on your own yet? 366. 367.Ricky: Yeah 368. 369.R: Will you be going to town with friends maybe? 370. 371.Ricky: No not friends 372. 373.R: No, so you are looking forward to being able to go out on 374. <u>your own?</u> 375.	Being able to going out on his own without supervision is something that he is looking forward to.
Reduced supervision	376.Ricky: Yeah 377. 378.R: Anything else you are looking forward to now that you are 379. <u>getting older and have more responsibilities?</u> 380. 381.Ricky: No 382.	

<p>Support from others</p> <p>Thoughts about the future</p>	<p>383.R: No, OK. Is there anything that you are not looking forward to  384.about leaving school to go to college?  385.  386.Ricky: No  387.  388.R: no OK. So what's the best thing about leaving school?  389.  390.Ricky: <u>I don't know</u>  391.  392.R: OK so whats the worst thing about leaving school?  393.  394.Ricky: <u>I don't know</u>  395.  396.R: OK that's fine. OK so do you think that Willow School has  397.helped you to get ready for college?  398.  399.Ricky: Yeah  400.  401.R: Did they help you to think about your future and what you  402.want to do?  403.  404.Ricky: <u>Definitely</u>  405.  406.R: Yeah, how's that?  407.  408.Ricky: Well, <u>they there to say like you need a serious think what</u>  409.<u>you wanna do</u> and its like I know what I wanna do and <u>its help me</u>  410.<u>get so far to this course</u>  411.  412.R: So you think that they've helped you to think about what you</p>	<p>Avoidance of question?</p> <p>Avoidance of question?</p> <p><u>Strong word</u></p> <p><i>Use of emotive language signaling the importance of what he is talking about</i>  Such discussions have helped to him think about what he wants to do- map out his future.</p>
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	<p>413.wanna do? 414. 415.Ricky: <u>Yeah</u> 416. 417.R: That's good. So did you talk to your mum about what you 418.want to do when you leave school? 419. 420.Ricky: Yeah 421. 422.R: What did you talk to her about? 423.</p>	<p>Help from school to think about his future.</p>
<p>Post-school options</p>	<p>424.Ricky: <u>I said I wanna do cookery and then with life skills came</u> 425. 426.R: How did the life skills come about? 427.</p>	<p>Indication that his choice was cookery but somehow life skills was thrown into the mix.</p>
<p>Developing life skills</p>	<p>428.Ricky: <u>I got into pathways and its like yeah I think I need to do,</u> 429.<u>like carry on doing like maths and that</u> 430. 431.R: OK so who told you that you need to do likes kills before? 432.Why didn't you do cookery straightaway? 433.</p>	<p>Acknowledgement that he needs support with developing his life skills.</p>
<p>Readiness</p>	<p>434.Ricky: <u>Cos I'm not ready</u> 435. 436.R: OK, so who helped you to decide that it would be good for 437. you to do pathways before you do cookery? 438.</p>	<p>Doesn't feel ready to move onto cookery.</p>
<p>Support from others</p>	<p>439.Ricky: <u>My tutor and my mum, like they spoke together and they</u> 440.<u>came up with pathways</u> 441. 442.R: OK so when they came up with that do you think that they</p>	<p>Support from mum and tutor to think about what he would do next – seems to be a decision that was arrived at between the adults and then shared with the young person.</p>

<p>Listened to by others</p>	<p>443.were listening to what you wanted to do  444.  445.Ricky: Yeah  446.  447.R: Or did they think nope don't care what you want to do you  448.are doing pathways?  449.  450.Ricky: <u>No they listened to what I wanna do</u>  451.  452.R: That's good. So while you were at school did you have any  453.lessons about getting ready to move on to college?  454.  455.Ricky: Yeah  456.  457.R: Yeah? What kind of lessons did you have?  458.</p>	<p>He felt listened to.</p>
<p>Preparation for college</p>	<p>459.Ricky: <u>Like the tutor came to Willow School</u>  460.  461.R: And what happened?  462.</p>	<p>Support with preparation for transition.</p>
<p>Adjusting to change</p>	<p>463.Ricky: She told you how its gonna be like thing and its gonna be  464.like, <u>its gonna be quite different to school</u>, different rules and  465.things  466.  467.R: How did you feel about hearing that there are going to be  468.different rules at college?  469.</p>	
<p>Personal identity</p>	<p>470.Ricky: It's the same, <u>it's the same as school but you get to wear</u>  471.<u>your own clothes</u>  472.</p>	<p>No more uniform – does it represent a break from institutionalization?</p>

Work experience	<p>473.R: OK so did you wear a uniform at Willow School?  474.  475.Ricky: No  476.  477.R: Oh but you did before last year?  478.  479.Ricky: Yeah  480.  481.R: OK so how do you feel about not wearing uniform to college?  482.  483.Ricky: Quite good actually cos like you're not hot cos you know  484.that you can (pause)  485.  486.R: Wear what you want?  487.  488.Ricky: Yeah  489.  490.R: OK and the lady, the tutor who came into speak to you about  491.college, do you think that helped you to get ready to move to  492.college and to understand what it might be like?  493.  494.Ricky: Yeah  495.  496.R: Yeah. Uh did you do any work experience while you were  497.at the Willow School?  498.  499.Ricky: Yeah  500.  501.R: What did you do?  502.</p>	
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Nurturing interests	<p>503.Ricky: Worked in the kitchen  504.  505.R: Were you helping with the cooking?  506.  507.Ricky: Yeah  508.  509.R: How did you find that?  510.  511.Ricky: Quite good actually  512.  513.R: Yeah why is that?  514.</p>	Work experience linked to his interests.
Aspirations	<p>515.Ricky: Just like some, what I wanna do  516.  517.R: So did you choose to go in the kitchen or did someone tell you  518.that you would be in the kitchen?  519.  520.Ricky: <u>Someone put a word in</u> and they said “you can come and  521.do work experience here”  522.  523.R: Oh OK and were you happy about that?  524.</p>	Clear ideas about what he wants to do in the future.
Emotional experiences	<p>525.Ricky: Yeah  526.  527.R: Do you think they listened to you and chose the kitchen  528.because they knew you liked cooking?  529.  530.Ricky: Yeah  531.  532.R: OK that’s good. So you mentioned that you visited the</p>	Support from others – his views taken on and reflected in his work placement.

Preparation for college	<p>533.college for a taster session, how was that?  534.  535.Ricky: Yeah  536.  537.R: What did you do during the taster session?  538.  539.Ricky: Like showing around the building cos 'A' college is  540.quite a massive building <u>and just like to get you ready for when</u>  541.<u>we went to college and it did</u>  542.  543.R: it did? How did it?  544.</p>	Developing familiarity with the new surroundings.
Familiarity	<p>545.Ricky: <u>Well we knew where to go</u>  546.  547.R: And how did it make you feel that you knew where to go  548.and that you wouldn't get lost?  549.</p>	Being able to navigate the surroundings linked to increased confidence.
Confidence	<p>550.Ricky: <u>Quite confident</u>  551.  552.R: Confident, good. Why confident?  553.</p>	
Familiarity	<p>554.Ricky: It was just like, you didn't, you didn't need to know, <u>you</u>  555.<u>didn't need to worry</u> that much where oh I don't know it, you  556.did actually know it because you been there before  557.  558.R: OK and while you were at Willow School, did you  559.ever talk to a careers advisor about what you wanna  560.do?  561.</p>	<i>Emotive language- worry.</i> Anxiety associated with not knowing was reduced by being prepared for college.
Support from	<p>562.Ricky: Yeah</p>	

professionals	563.	
	564.R: What did you talk about?	
	565.	
Support from	566.Ricky: <u>I don't remember cos we only had one in the year</u>	Access to a careers advisor while at school.
professionals	567.	Experience of meeting the advisor doesn't stand
	568.R: OK. And when you were in year 9 can you remember what	out much.
	569.you wanted to do then when you left school? Was it cooking or	
	570.something else?	
	571.	
	572.Ricky: <u>Something else</u>	
	573.	
	574.R: Oh ok so you changed your mind after year 9?	
	575.	
	576.Ricky: Yeah	Changed his mind about what he wanted to do in
	577.	the future.
	578.R: So the meeting with the careers advisor can you remember if it	
Support from	579.was helpful or not?	
professionals	580.	
	581.Ricky: <u>No cos she only came a couple of times</u>	Was the experience not helpful or he cant
	582.	remember if it was?
	583.R: OK so do you think it would have been good if she came	
	584.to talk to you when you were in sixth form?	
	585.	
Timing of support	586.Ricky: <u>Not sixth form but year 11 cos you knew where you</u>	Would have preferred the opportunity to speak to
	587. <u>wanted to go</u>	a careers advisor in year 11 as opposed to year 9
	588.	because he had a clearer picture of what his
	589.R: OK so she didn't come in year 11 then?	aspirations are.
	590.	
	591.Ricky: I don't think so	
	592.	

Preparation for college	<p>593.R: OK. So in year 12 you started to go to sixth form and you 594.did 3 days a week at college and... 595. 596.Ricky: And two days at Willow School 597. 598.R: OK. So after the taster session how did you feel when you first 599.went to 'A' college for the three days a week? 600. 601.Ricky: <u>Nervous and excited</u> 602. 603.R: Tell me about it 604.</p>	<p><i>Mixed feelings about going to both school and college.</i></p>
Emotional experiences	<p>605.Ricky: <u>Well nervous because you didn't know the people back</u> 606.<u>then</u> but then you got to know em and then you eventually get, 607.start to come out of your shell. 608. 609.R: OK and why were you excited? 610.</p>	<p>Nervous about not knowing people at college.</p>
Familiarity	<p>611.Ricky: Its just like you got to know people and its like they <u>made</u> 612.<u>you feel welcome</u> 613. 614.R: What did they do to make you feel welcome? 615. 616.Ricky: <u>They got to know you and what you need help and what</u> 617.<u>you don't need help</u> 618. 619.R: And how did that make you feel that they knew what you 620.needed help with? 621.</p>	<p>Building relationships appears to be something that matters to him – has a positive impact on his experience on his preparation/ transition for college.</p> <p>Needs being understood by staff had an impact on his experience.</p>
Familiarity	<p>622.Ricky: Quite good actually</p>	<p>Knowing that staff knew his needs made him feel</p>

<p>Adjusting to change</p> <p>Adjusting to</p>	<p>623.          624.R: That's good. Uh so when you first started at the college last          625.year what did you think of the college?          626.          627.Ricky: Uh quite massive and it was just good, got loads of space          628.          629.R: OK. So you went there three days a week when you were          630.in year 12?          631.          632.Ricky: Yeah          633.          634.R: So how did you find going there and then going back to          635.Willow School for two days?          636.          637.Ricky: <u>Quite good the splitting up</u>          638.          639.R: Why do you think it was good that it was split up?          640.          641.Ricky: Because you would like, <u>its good for a change</u>. Your there          642.for 3 days (college) and there for two (school), its quite good          643.change          644.          645.R: OK. So how did it feel going back to school after being at          646.college for three days?          647.          648.Ricky: <u>Weird a little bit</u>          649.          650.R: Weird? Tell me why its was weird          651.          652.Ricky: It was just like, <u>you got so used to being at college and</u></p>	<p>good. <u>Containment</u>.</p> <p><u>Could this reflect him initially not feeling contained?</u></p> <p>Safety blanket? Knowing that school would be there – not having to move altogether.</p> <p>Change being viewed in a positive way – would this have been the case if he had to move straight into college without the opportunity have a phased transition?</p> <p>Ambiguous feeling?</p> <p>Being seen as grown up in one setting and then</p>
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<p>change</p> <p>Growing up</p> <p>Increasing autonomy</p> <p>Adjusting to change</p>	<p>653. <u>then you go to school rules</u> and its just like woah</p> <p>654.</p> <p>655.R: So how did you feel when you were at college</p> <p>656.</p> <p>657.Ricky: <u>Grown up</u></p> <p>658.</p> <p>659.R: Why did you feel grown up at college?</p> <p>660.</p> <p>661.Ricky: <u>Your left to your own, well you're not left to your own</u></p> <p>662. <u>device, but you're allowed to do a little bit more than school</u></p> <p>663.</p> <p>664.R: And do you like that?</p> <p>665.</p> <p>666.Ricky: Yeah</p> <p>667.</p> <p>668.R: And how did you feel when you went back to school?</p> <p>669.</p> <p>670.Ricky: <u>You're not allowed to do that much like at college</u></p> <p>671.</p> <p>672.R: OK so what did you enjoy most about going to college for</p> <p>673. those three days?</p> <p>674.</p> <p>675.Ricky: I like the subjects cos they are all different each day and</p> <p>676. its like quite good cos at school you know what you are gonna</p> <p>677. do like you know the lessons. <u>At college you don't you go in</u></p> <p>678. <u>and you find out what you doing</u></p> <p>679.</p> <p>680.R: Oh ok and you like that?</p> <p>681.</p> <p>682.Ricky: Yeah different change, and plus you don't, you don't like</p>	<p>'regressing' back to being told what to do in another – confusing.</p> <p>Feelings associated with being mature when at college.</p> <p>Freedom and independence.</p> <p>Likes the independence and maturity associated with being at college. College = increased freedom.</p> <p>College not as structured as school – increased flexibility.</p> <p>Embracing change – positive about it.</p>
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<p>Listened to by others</p>	<p>683.one day you could be doing like Art yeah working on a like,  684.and then the next day you could do art still but working on a  685.different  686.  687.R: So are there different things for you to do?  688.  689.Ricky: Yeah  690.  691.R: OK so did you find anything difficult when you were at  692.college?  693.  694.Ricky: No  695.  696.R: OK so when you had the conversations about what you  697.want to do when you leave school do you think people  698.listened to you or not?  699.  700.Ricky: No they did listen  701.  702.R: Who listened to you?  703.  704.Ricky: <u>Practically everyone</u>  705.  706.R: Yeah, who did?  707.  708.Ricky: <u>Mum, head teacher, tutor</u>  709.  710.R: OK. So do you know what an annual review meeting is?  711.  712.Ricky: Yeah, <u>kind of</u></p>	<p>Felt listened to.</p> <p>Felt listened to by everyone.</p>
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Attendance at meetings	<p>713.  714.R: Its like a meeting you have at the end of the term in year 9  715.to think about what you want to do when you leave school.  716.Have you been to any other meetings at school with your  717.mum?  718.  719.Ricky: Yeah  720.  721.R: Yeah, tell me about those meetings  722.  723.Ricky: Uh review meetings  724.  725.R: OK tell me about those meetings  726.</p>	Experience of being at meetings to discuss aspects of post-school transition.
Information sharing	<p>727.Ricky: Its where you know where <u>your grades are and everything</u>  728.and where you're at and what you need help on a little more  729.and that stuff  730.  731.R: OK and when you went to the meetings who was there? You...  732.  733.Ricky: My mum and the like class teacher  734.  735.R: Anyone else?  736.  737.Ricky: No  738.  739.R: OK and when you were at those meetings were  740.you able to talk about how things were going for you?  741.</p>	His understanding of the meetings – more focus on needs at the moment – nothing much said about post-school.
Listened to by	742.Ricky: Yeah	Opportunity to take part in meetings. Felt

others	743.	listened to.
	744.R: Were you able to talk about what you would like to do	
	745.when you leave school?	
Aspirations	746.	
	747.Ricky: Yeah	
	748.	
	749.R: And do you think everyone listened to you in the meeting?	
	750.	
	751.Ricky: Yeah	
	752.	
	753.R: OK and during the meetings did you talk about your targets	
	754.and targets that you might have for next year?	
	755.	
	756.Ricky: Yeah	
	757.	
	758.R: So do you think those meetings helped you to think about	
	759.the future or was it more about your grades?	
Participation in meetings	760.	
	761.Ricky: <u>Uh more about my grades but at the end of like year 11</u>	More focus on attainment – but by the end of year 11 the opportunity to discuss future educational pursuits.
	762. <u>you got to like know like what your levels are and what like</u>	
	763. <u>course you can get like with your grades</u>	
	764.	
	765.R: And would you talk about that at the meetings?	
	766.	
	767.Ricky: Yeah	
	768.	
	769.R: OK, so are you ready to move to college?	
Ready to move on	770.	
	771.Ricky: Yeah	Feels ready to move to college.
	772.	

<p>Growing up</p>	<p>773.R: Why do you think you are ready? Why cant you stay at Willow 774.School? 775. 776.Ricky: Uh <u>the times up really and plus your 17 and your like, I'm</u> 777. <u>17 and I'm nearly like 18 in January and its like you're too</u> 778. <u>grown up for school now and you need to go to college to do</u> 779. <u>something with your life and its like eventually you will forget</u> 780. <u>about Willow School, you won't but you try to (laugh)</u> 781. 782.R: Do you think it will be hard trying to forget about Willow 783.School? 784. 785.Ricky: No (laugh) 786. 787.R: So when you go to college is there any support that you 788.thing you will need? 789.</p>	<p><u>Time bound.</u> Approaching adulthood – perceptions of growing up and having to move on. Doing something with you life – socially desirable – making a contribution to society? Self reassurance – helps him to move on- rejection of negative feelings?</p>
<p>Learning support</p>	<p>790.Ricky: Yeah, my hand... spelling and my writing 791. 792.R: OK anything else? 793. 794.Ricky: Uh trying to spell out words 795. 796.R: So like with your writing? 797. 798.Ricky: Yeah 799. 800.R: OK and do you know if they are going to give you that 801.support when you go there? 802.</p>	<p>Nervous laugh?</p> <p>Areas he feels he needs support with.</p>

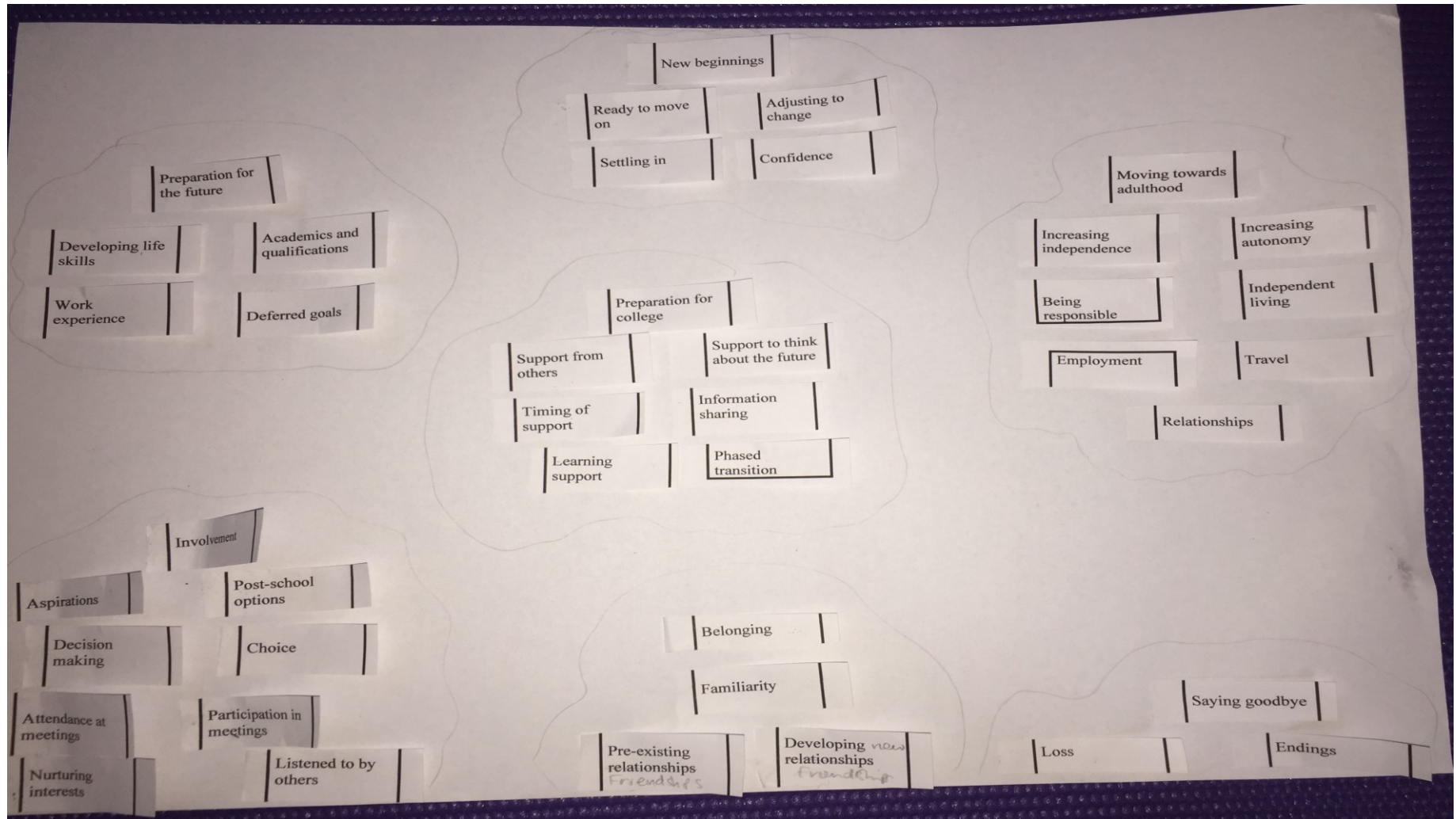


	<p>833.  834.R: OK so you want to move on to do cookery, so how will  835.you get there? What is your plan to get there?  836.  837.Ricky: <u>I'm gonna do a two years course and then I'm gonna try</u>  838.<u>and do apprenticeship and then eventually when that's up I'm</u>  839.<u>gonna look for a job in cookery.</u>  840.  841.R: So it sounds like you have a clear plan for what you are  842.going to do. You also mentioned that you'd like to live on your  843.own have you had conversations about that with mum?  844.  845.Ricky: No not yet  846.  847.R: Does she know?  848.  849.Ricky: No  850.  851.R: OK so why do you want to live on your own?  852.  853.Ricky: <u>Eventually you're gonna have to well yeah</u>  854.  855.R: And what is it about living on your own, will you be  856.happy to live on your own or would you prefer to stay at  857.home?  858.  859.Ricky: <u>Uh a little bit of both</u>  860.  861.R: A little bit of both. If you move out n your own how will  862.that make you feel?</p>	<p>Clear post-school plans that he would like to pursue.</p> <p>He hasn't had discussions with his mother about his wish to one day live on his own.</p> <p>Feels that living on his own has to happen at some point. Reflective of his view of what adulthood will involve.</p> <p>Reflective of his school to college experience.</p>
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	<p>863.  864.Ricky: <u>You could do what you want</u> (laughs)  865.  866.R: More freedom? OK and you talked about being more  867.independent. Is that something that you are looking forward  868.to?  869.  870.Ricky: Uh yeah  871.  872.R: OK so what does being independent in the future mean to you?  873.  874.Ricky: <u>Like more like you're very grown up. Like if you live on</u>  875.<u>your own</u> and yeah  876.  877.R: OK and uh had anyone talked to you at school or college  878.about being an adult and having to make choices and decisions?  879.  880.Ricky: Yeah  881.  882.R: What did they talk about?  883.  884.Ricky: <u>Uh you always have a choice in your life and some of</u>  885.<u>them might be good choices and some of them might be bad</u>  886.<u>choices</u>  ... </p>	<p><u>Freedom. Autonomy over ones life.</u></p> <p>Some of the things that independence represents.</p>
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## Appendix 12 – Spatial Representations of emergent themes (Ricky)



### Appendix 13 – Ricky’s emergent and super-ordinate theme groups

Possible Super-ordinate Themes and Emergent Themes	Page/ Line	Keywords
<p><i>Post-school options</i></p> <p>Choices available</p> <p>Participation in meetings</p> <p>Listened to by others</p>	28. 884-886	Uh you always have a choice in your life and some of them might be good choices and some of them might be bad choices
	49. 1555	They gave you a choice
	23. 723	Review meetings
	15. 450	No they listened to what I wanna do
	23. 700	they did listen
	23. 704-708	Practically everyone ... mum, head teacher, tutor
	29. 905-906	They just said you might meet someone and eventually you wanna move in
<p><i>Saying “Goodbye”</i></p>		

Belonging	1. 3	I been there for 13 years
	2. 28-29	it's been my life really, like I been there for a whole 13 years
	2. 34-35	You get to know everyone, you get to like eventually be part of the school,
Endings	5. 145	The leaving do, the prom
	5. 153	Quite, quite sad actually cos you know that you're leaving
	6. 157-158	I was OK because I was coming back, but some people were like not going back and were sad about it
	25.779-780	Its like eventually you will forget about Wchool, you won't but you try to (laugh)
Loss	9. 262-264	Quite sad actually because its like you're going, you're moving yeah and you wont see em', but you can always pop back and say hi
	9. 282-284	eventually I know they're gonna be going to, not all of them some of them will be going to *** school and college so I know that I'll see em' sometimes
Ready to move on	2. 34	You get to know everyone, you get to like eventually be part of the school
	6. 179	Make more friends actually
	6. 187	Uh teachers and tutors, its gone from teachers to tutors now

	7. 197-199	Quite good actually cos you can't always (pause), you can't always uh (long pause) you can't always be at *** School, you need to move on and its good for a change
	8. 255	Quite good
	9. 272-277	Its just that like you need, you need to get like used to the idea of going to college, if you pop back and all the time you won't get used to being at college, you'll be like "oh I'm just going to see *** School" and you won't get used to cos you know that you'll always gonna be poppin' in there and its like you need to move on
	25. 776-779	the times up really and plus your 17 and your like, I'm 17 and I'm nearly like 18 in January and its like you're too grown up for school now and you need to go to college to do something with your life
	50. 1564	I was ready to go to college
<b><i>Support</i></b>		
Preparation for college	8. 220	She said its gonna be all different but not to worry
	8. 248-249	I think I'll be quite good cos we did a taster day in year 11 and where you go and try out the things and it was quite good
	13. 404	Definitely
	13. 408-410	Well, they there to say like you need a serious think what you wanna do and its like I know what I wanna do and its help me get so far to this course
	15. 463-465	She told you how its gonna be like thing and its gonna be like, its gonna be quite different to

		school, different rules and things
	17-18. 539-541	Like showing around the building cos 'A' college is quite a massive building and just like to get you ready for when we went to college and it did
	18. 554-556	you didn't need to worry that much where oh I don't know it, you did actually know it because you been there before
	20. 605-607	Well nervous because you didn't know the people back then but then you got to know em and then you eventually get, start to come out of your shell.
	20. 611-612	Its just like you got to know people and its like they made you feel welcome
	38. 1201-1203	Yeah because we get, with 6 <sup>th</sup> form your only there for two days and you're in college the rest of the week, and its like your getting used to college A
Timing of support	32. 1000-1001	Hmmm it would have been nice to speak to someone in 6 <sup>th</sup> form but year 11 was ok
Learning support	20. 616-617	They got to know you and what you need help and what you don't need help
	26. 808	Well they should know that already
	37. 1146-1148	There's like different like levels like and I wasn't really good at multi uhh maths uh adding up in the hundreds and all that and now I getting sort of better at it

	43. 13561-1362	Because they sit next to you and they give you help like guidance
<i>New beginnings</i>		
Adjusting to change	8. 225-227	There's a group of us in, but we all wont be like together we'll be all mixed up and different hours and everything like we finish at different times
	15. 470-471	It's the same, it's the same as school but you get to wear your own clothes
	21. 641	Its good for a change
	21. 649-650	It was just like, you got so used to being at college and then you go to *** school rules and its just like woah
	22. 670	You're not allowed to do that much like at college
	22. 675-677	I like the subjects cos they are all different each day and its like quite good cos at school you know what you are gonna do like you know the lessons.
	33. 1039-1040	Like, it's a new life basically.
	33. 1092-1095	It breaks it up because I'm only there, only there for three days and its nice that you don't, you don't do the same thing everyday, you do different things so it doesn't get boring.
	40. 1253	The good change for me is that you get three days off

New friendships	33. 1042-1043	I'm making new friends ... and I still see Willow school people.
	34. 1061	Uh they different cos they grown up
<i>Preparing for the future</i>		
Developing life skills	2. 46	I know that it can help me more and more
	2. 50	Umm like life skills basically
	2. 54	Umm like money and all that
	14. 428-429	I got into pathways and its like yeah I think I need to do , like carry on doing like maths and that
	31. 969	Like money skills and uh cooking and uh writing
	33. 1017	Well I'm getting better at things
	33. 1021	Well practising cooking and money and all that
	36. 1134	Well its helping me move forward and get better at things
	43. 1344	It got me better at writing and at maths and reading
	44. 1398-1399	Uh no they did do things like they uh helped us with our money and all that and make sure that you're independent like living.

Aspirations	10. 307-308	Well I'm doing life skills but after life skills I want to do cookery
	14. 424	I said I wanna do cookery and then with life skills came
	26. 830	Getting on the cooking like thing
	27. 837-839	I'm gonna do a two years course and then I'm gonna try and do apprenticeship and then eventually when that's up I'm gonna look for a job in cookery
Grades and qualifications	24. 761-763	Uh more about my grades but at the end of like year 11 you got to like know like what your levels are and what like course you can get like with your grades
Work Experience	16. 503	Worked in the kitchen
	17. 512	What I wanna do
	35. 1100-1104	Employability ... its where they getting you ready for work and when you leave
Deferred Goals	14. 434	Cos I'm not ready
	14. 439-440	My tutor and my mum, like they spoke together and they came up with pathways
	37. 1163-	Its getting you ready for the things that I need to do to get a job and I need maths and cooking



	1165	skills to do what I want to do.
<b><i>Moving towards adulthood</i></b>		
Increasing independence	8. 227-229	Its more independently so you won't get more, you will get, you still will get help but you won't get like so much help
	8. 236	Quite scary
	8. 238-239	I've always like had someone there to support me
	12. 348-349	I'm looking forward to it because it means you're older now and you're getting, its something to do at the end of the day
	12. 358-359	You get more, you get more like, you get more like more responsibilities
	12. 363	Like going out to town on your own
	21. 661-662	Your left to your own, well you're not left to your own device, but you're allowed to do a little bit more than school
	39. 1213	College and you get more like uh independence
	39. 1217	You can go out on your own and that
	28. 864	You could do what you want (laughs)
	40. 1209	You get treated like grown ups

Independent living	227. 830-831	Live on my own and just like be independent
	27. 853	Eventually you're gonna have to well yeah
	28. 874-875	Like more like you're very grown up. Like if you live on your own and yeah
Employment	28. 891	To get money
Travel	41. 1281	By travel trainer
	41.1299	I prefer to go on my own
Relationships	29. 905-906	They just said you might meet someone and eventually you wanna move in

## Appendix 14 – Overview of emergent and super-ordinate themes across all cases

**Overview of Emergent and Sub-ordinate Themes across all cases**

P1	YP1	P2	YP2	P3	YP3
<b>Belonging</b> -Familiarity -Attachment to staff members -Peer relationships -Loss	<b>Post-school options</b> -Choices available -Participation in meetings -Listened to by others	<b>Passive Involvement</b> -Participation in meetings -Views sought -Professionals as decision-makers	<b>Making decisions</b> Participation in meetings Ability to voice aspirations	<b>Views listened to</b> Participation in meetings Choice Options	<b>Post-school options</b> Choice Views listened to by others
<b>Feeling listened to</b> Choice Involvement in meetings Professionals' involvement during meetings	<b>Saying "Goodbye"</b> Belonging Endings Loss Ready to move on	<b>No looking back</b> Attachment Familiarity Adjusting to change Double placement as preparation for college	<b>Adjusting to change</b> Leaving school Settling in at college Friendships Revisiting the past Loss	<b>Endings</b> Ready to move on Experiences of earlier educational transitions	<b>Adjusting to change</b> Friendships Relationships Settling in Looking back
<b>Support</b> Communication Being informed about the next steps Preparation for college	<b>Support</b> Preparation for college Timing of support Learning support	<b>Unequal Opportunities</b> Access to services Extra-curricular activities Funding issues	<b>Developing life skills</b> Independence	<b>Taking a huge step</b> Adjusting to change Friendships Revisiting the past	<b>Nurturing Interests</b> Work experience
<b>Impact of Special Educational Needs</b> Lack of qualifications Aspirations Realistic goals Developmentally immature	<b>New beginnings</b> Adjusting to change New friendships	<b>A child trapped in an adult's body</b> Impact of learning difficulty Development of life skills Realistic Expectations Safeguarding Continued supervision	<b>Independence</b> Autonomy Employment Independent living Relationships Socializing with peers Creating own family	<b>Support</b> Information sharing Funding Preparation for college Support from services continuation of services	<b>Perception of adulthood</b> Independence Future aspirations
<b>Approaching adulthood</b> Uncertainty about the future Independence Employment prospects	<b>Preparing for the future</b> Developing life skills Aspirations Grades and qualifications Work Experience Deferred Goals			<b>Growing up</b> Developing life skills Independence Work Experience Independent living Employment Nurturing interests	
<b>Unequal access to options and opportunities</b> Access to services Funding Lack of available choices	<b>Moving towards adulthood</b> Increasing independence Independent living Employment Travel Relationships			<b>What happens next?</b> Uncertainty Continuity of services Vulnerability	

■ Involvement

■ Support

■ Moving towards adulthood

■ Adjusting to change

■ Saying "goodbye"

### Appendix 15 - Master Table of group themes

Group Themes	Phenomenological Evidence – Line and Page number					
	Ricky	Ms Smith	Sabina	Mr Nassar	Sam	Ms Jones
<b><i>Adjusting to change</i></b>						
Saying goodbye	9. 262-264	9. 272-273	5. 154	26. 819-820	19. 593	28. 883-885
Double placement	18. 554-556	11. 328-333	13. 399	13. 396-403	27. 830	23. 718-723
Settling in	40. 1253	34. 1079-1081	27. 833-834	26. 815	24. 757	26. 813-814
<b><i>Involvement and Support</i></b>						
Participation in meetings	23. 723	18. 546-553	34. 1065	14. 438-439	27. 842	31. 979-983
Choice	49. 1555	34. 1063-1067	11. 338	14. 413-417	15. 447	11. 318-322
Support from professionals	7.208	22. 687-690	4. 99	6. 166-172	9. 266	15. 457-458
Access to services	32. 1000-1001	28. 860-863		10. 284-294		4. 109-112
<b><i>Moving towards adulthood</i></b>						
Aspirations	10. 307-308	17. 508-510	11. 330	26. 799-803	13. 389	7. 212-216
Preparing for the future	37. 1163-1165	43. 1359-1365	31-32. 983-984	18. 560-565		20. 616-618
Growing up and Independence	28. 874-875	30. 938-942	15. 454	5. 148-151	25. 773	11. 317

# **Appendix 12 – Anonymised Transcripts and IPA Analysis CD-ROM**