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How do secondary school SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET, and how might educational psychologists support in this area?

How do secondary school SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to

identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET, and how might educational

psychologists support in this area?

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Abstract

This research focuses on the views of secondary school staff on reducing the likelihood of young people becoming "NEET" – a governmental category used to refer to 16-24-year-olds who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training. NEET young people have historically been referred to as 'lacking aspirations'. However, some young people are more likely to become NEET than others and there are negative outcomes associated with periods spent NEET (Department for Education (DfE), 2018a; Public Health England, 2014), highlighting that it is a social justice issue. Recent statutory guidance has increased the accountability and responsibility of schools to deliver career guidance and education (Department for Education, 2018b; 2021a), arguably increasing the role of schools in reducing NEET.

This research offers a timely contribution by exploring the perceptions of special educational needs coordinators (SENDCos) and career leaders on the role that schools have in reducing NEET, the strengths and challenges in completing this work, and the potential support from educational psychologists (EPs). Joint semi-structured interviews were used. The findings were analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (2021a) and explored using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological model (1995) and Ryan and Deci's Self Determination Theory (2000).

The findings suggest that schools are perceived to have two key roles in preventing NEET: a whole school focus on careers and offering targeted support. Six strategies used by schools were identified: raising aspirations and supporting students to make informed choices about their futures, nurturing relationships, the contribution of all staff members, working with vulnerable students, supporting families, and support from external professionals. Several challenges were also identified: the capacity of schools and external services, and barriers beyond school, such as travel, the accessibility of courses, and the environment of post-16 settings.

The responses suggested that schools are well placed to prevent students from becoming NEET but impacted by resourcing and contextual issues. There were some limitations in the perceptions,

including a prevailing emphasis on the influence of aspirations and a limited focus on overcoming

contextual barriers. Implications are given for schools, EPs, local authorities, and government.

A contribution of this research is the development of a two-page guide for schools on how to apply

psychology to preventing young people from becoming NEET.

Acknowledgements

Author Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed: ██████████   Date: 15.07.2022

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
DfE	Department for Education
EHCP	Education Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
KS4	Key Stage Four
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
SEND	Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. The Focus of the Research

The following is a qualitative study exploring the views and experiences of secondary school career leaders and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators (SENDCos, also called SENCos) on the role that schools have in supporting pupils that are at risk of being not in education, employment or training (NEET) after leaving school. The research took place in a rurally located county in the Southwest of England.

The study aimed to find out how staff members perceive the role that schools have, the strengths and challenges in completing this work, and the potential support from educational psychologists (EPs). The term "NEET" will be defined more thoroughly within this chapter. However, briefly, it refers to young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (Explore Education Statistics, 2022). As will be discussed, some young people are more likely to become NEET than others. There are also several negative outcomes associated with periods spent NEET, highlighting that it is a social justice issue.

In this introductory chapter, I outline the relevance of the topic. I start with my personal and professional motivation. I then explore the significance of the topic as a social justice issue by exploring relevant statistics, risk factors, and outcomes associated with time spent being NEET. Next, I outline the timeliness of this research by exploring policy and the potential preventative role for schools. I then outline the relevance of the topic for the educational psychology (EP) profession.

1.2. Personal & Professional Motivation

One of my initial considerations around the area of focus for my thesis was the desire to contribute toward a *social justice* agenda, a phrase I refer to throughout the thesis. Social justice has been defined by Bell (1997) as "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p.3). The topic has ultimate relevance to the work of EPs, who work to create positive change for children and young people, who are often marginalised or

not fully included within educational and community systems. It was therefore important to me that my research would help draw attention to and offer insight on area of inequality within society. For me, social justice is related to two key values of equity and inclusion. I used these values to guide me through the research process, from the initial consideration of the topic area, to setting the context in the introductory chapter and literature review, and reflections on my research findings.

I knew that reducing NEET had relevance to social justice due to a previous role I had as an engagement worker which involved working with NEET young people. Through this, I noticed some of the barriers these young people faced in finding opportunities post-16. Some had mental health needs, a low sense of belonging in school, and often lacked the additional support they needed to find an opportunity. I also noticed some other barriers. There was a lack of suitable options for these young people. Some did not have the necessary grades to be where they wanted to be and were left with options that did not interest them. Many had missed the start dates of courses, so they were looking for 'filler' options for the year. Some started courses and then dropped out. There were also positives in this work; those who found courses that met their needs, benefited from the support, and grew in confidence. These examples made the work feel valuable and important.

Later, while completing my training to become an EP, I realised that working with Key Stage 4 (KS4) pupils on the cusp of post-16 transition and those starting further education was an area of interest for me. It felt like an exciting time where young people were thinking about what they wanted out of life, and some were moving on to study a particular area of interest. Again, I also noticed challenges. Some parents, young people, and school staff appeared concerned about the lack of suitable opportunities for the needs and interests of the young people. Others were also concerned about the potential challenges afforded within the post-16 settings, such as larger campuses, new experiences, public transport, and long breaks between sessions. I also

worked with young people in post-16 provisions, some of whom struggled with the change and were at risk of not attending.

I wondered what the role of the EP was in supporting and preventing young people from becoming NEET. However, conversations with colleagues and my reading of the literature seemed to lack a clear answer. At the same time as wondering about our role, I spoke to a senior EP at the local authority where I was on placement. She informed me that reducing NEET was currently a priority for the local authority. I had always wanted my thesis topic to be relevant to the area I was working in and hoped it could have a real-world impact. This conversation and my previous experiences propelled me to focus my thesis on the topic of NEET, the role of schools and EP support.

1.3. Defining NEET

It is necessary to define the term NEET because it has been defined in different ways, internationally and over time (Furlong, 2006). The term NEET was first established by the Labour Government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1999 in the *Bridging the Gap Report* (SEU, 1999). At the time, the category referred to 16–18-year-olds (SEU, 1999, p. 15) but was extended to 24 in a governmental publication, *Building Engagement, Building Futures,* in 2011 (HM Government, 2011). This thesis will use the definition given by the Explore Education Statistics (2022); the government website responsible for publishing NEET statistics (previously these statistics were published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) from 2011 to 2021). The definition given on the Explore Education Statistics website states that young people are considered in education employment or training if they are either:

- Enrolled and attending (or waiting to start) an education course (part or full-time)

- Completing an apprenticeship

- On a government funded employment or training initiative.

- Working or studying to gain a qualification.

- In paid work (including those that are temporarily on holiday or off sick).

(Explore Education Statistics, 2022)

Young people are considered NEET if they do not meet the above criteria and have been outside of education, employment, or training for more than four weeks.

1.4. Significance of the Topic as a Social Justice Issue

It is important to consider the number of young people who are NEET and the associated risk factors and outcomes to understand the significance of the topic and frame it within a social justice perspective. Additionally, as EPs have a role in advocating for marginalised groups and promoting change for children and young people (Beaver, 2011; Mackay, 2002), the profession must have an understanding of those who may be at greater risk of becoming NEET and the potential impacts.

1.4.1. UK NEET Statistics

The most recent NEET statistics at the time of finalising this draft indicate that the NEET rate for the end of 2021 was 10.5% of young people aged 16-24 (Explore Education Statistics, 2022, March 3). An analysis of recent statistics published by the House of Commons Library (Powell, 2021) summarises that NEET statistics have fallen since 2011. The document summarised that following the 2008 recession, the number of NEET 16-24 years olds increased and peaked in July-September 2011 when the NEET rate was 16.9% and since then, the numbers have been falling. Whilst the current figure is lower than the levels reached following the 2008 financial crash, UK NEET figures are above many comparable nations (Powell, 2021).

Statistics provided by the local authority that I was on placement at as a trainee EP suggest that in 2018 the NEET rate was slightly lower than the national average for 16-24-year-olds. However, 16-18-year-olds faired less well within the county, comparatively, with a statistic broadly in line with the national average. It was not possible to gather more up-to-date local authority statistics as these were not published by the local authority or on the Explore Education Statistics website.

1.4.2. Risk factors associated with an increased risk of becoming NEET

As described in a report by Public Health England (2014), "the chances of becoming NEET are not equally or randomly distributed throughout society" (p. 6). There are several risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of becoming NEET, highlighting that the topic is a social justice issue, which impacts disproportionately on certain groups raising questions of equity and inclusion for these groups.

A publication by the Department for Education (DfE, 2018a) explored the characteristics of NEET young people using school demographic data. The evaluation tracked all school leavers in the UK from 2010 and 2011 for three years and analysed the prevalence of a range of school-based variables for young people classed as long-term (for over a year) NEET at 18. The research found that certain groups were disproportionately likely to be NEET. In particular, children in care, who made up 37% of the NEET category. Other risk factors were identified, such as attending a pupil referral unit or alternative provision, permanent exclusion at KS4, having a special educational need or disability (SEND) statement at 15, being classed as a child in need, having low educational attainment, and being eligible for free school meals (an indicator of low family income).

There are several limitations in the DfE publication. It looked only at young people who were "long-term NEET" (for over a year). Including young people that were NEET for shorter periods may have yielded different statistics. Additionally, as it relies on categories available from school data, it misses some other potentially important risk factors. Furthermore, the data was collected over eight years ago, which raises questions about its applicability today. Despite these limitations, the statistics highlight that children who are already vulnerable (i.e. in care, with SEND, with low attainment etc.) are at greater risk of becoming NEET, further underlining that NEET is a social justice issue.

The broader literature also highlights a range of individual, familial, societal and educational factors associated with an increased likelihood of becoming NEET. These include:

- Having physical and mental health needs, including substance misuse (Scott et al,. 2013; Rodwell et al., 2018; Audit Commission, 2010).

- Involvement with the youth offending team (Audit Commission, 2010).

- Low socioeconomic status, particularly in northern parts of England (Boshoff et al., 2019).

- Those with caring responsibilities for family members or those who become young parents (Audit Commission, 2010; Maguire, 2018).

- Low educational attainment, negative school experiences, and persistent absenteeism (Furlong, 2006; Powell, 2021). For instance, the 2020 Labour Force Survey found that young people with no qualifications had a NEET prevalence rate of 24% in comparison to 9% of those with GCSEs and above (Powell, 2021)

- The Labour Force Survey also found those classed as Equality Act Disabled had a high prevalence rate (28%) in comparison to those that were not Equality Act Disabled (8%.) (Powell, 2021).

- Gender has varied over time. Previously, young women were more likely to become NEET, often linked to caring and parenthood responsibilities (Maguire, 2018). However, in the UK, NEET rates suggest that males are now slightly more likely to become NEET than females (Powell, 2021).

- Ethnicity: the 2020 Labour Force Survey (Powell, 2021) indicated that Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people had the highest rate (13%), followed by Black, African, Caribbean, and Black British young people (12%), and White young people at 11%. Young people from Indian, Chinese, and other Asian backgrounds had the lowest prevalence (6%).

1.4.3. Outcomes associated with being NEET

As well as specific groups and risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of becoming NEET, the literature discusses many potential long-term impacts of prolonged periods

outside of education, employment and training. These impacts include consequences on future earnings, job opportunities, welfare dependency (Gregg & Tomine, 2005; Ralston et al., 2016; Kelly & McGuinness, 2015), future mental and physical health, and a higher susceptibility to involvement in substance misuse and crime (Robertson, 2019). Policymakers also have concerns about the economic impact of these periods of NEET on future unemployment and demand for health and social care services (Holmes et al., 2021).

1.5. Critique of term

When considering the category NEET and relevant literature, it is necessary to approach the term with criticality. There are several criticisms of the term:

- Research evidence shows that young people under the NEET category often come from a diverse range of situations, are at different transition points, stay NEET for varying lengths of time, and face different challenges (Finlay et al., 2010; Pemberton, 2008; Yates & Payne, 2006). NEET, therefore, refers to a heterogeneous group of young people. However, grouping them all under one classification can infer a level of homogeneity or that they have similar needs and will respond to similar interventions (Yates & Payne, 2006).

- The term could be considered to have negative connotations (Finlay et al., 2010) as it focuses on what the young people are *not* doing rather than their potential personal growth (Mullen, 2015). For instance, some within the category may have made a decision to be NEET because they have caring responsibilities for family members or their own children or may be in a temporary state, such as taking a year out or a recent graduate (Yates & Payne, 2006).

- Some have argued that there are connotations with the NEET label that lead to stereotyping and discrimination of young people within this category and assumptions that

they lack aspirations and are responsible for their NEET status, rather than focusing on the structural factors (Maguire, 2015).

- It has also been argued that the category is flawed and impossible to measure due to young people constantly moving in and out of NEET status (Pemberton, 2008). Furthermore, there is no internationally agreed definition, which makes comparisons of governmental initiatives challenging (Furlong, 2006).

As well as noting the limitations of the label, as discussed above, there are groups of young people who are more likely to become NEET and a raft of potential adverse outcomes associated with being NEET. Therefore, the term could also be considered helpful in raising the profile of the needs of potentially vulnerable young people and highlighting structural barriers, which could direct focus, promote early support, and influence policy. Additionally, the term has been said to offer a useful indicator of the condition of youth labour markets and opportunities (Holmes et al., 2021). In this thesis, the term NEET will be used while being aware of the limitations.

1.6. Relevant Policy & Context

This section summarises the key pieces of policy and governmental guidance since 2000, which offer important contextual information, given the changing landscape of NEET prevention and intervention. As the research was conducted in England, this section focuses on English policy, although some comparisons are made with the devolved nations. As will be argued below, the potential role for schools in preventing NEET has increased over time, with increased responsibility for supporting students' careers guidance and education allocated to schools.

1.6.1. The Raising of the Participation Age

A fundamental change in the NEET strategy was raising the participation age from 16 to 18. This change was first outlined in the 2008 Education and Skills Act and became statutory guidance in 2013 (updated in 2016, DfE 2016). The guidance detailed that young people would be legally obliged to stay in education or training until their 18th birthday from 2015 onwards. The guidance also summarised that local authorities would hold the responsibility and accountability

to support young people to remain in education or training post-16. These duties include securing suitable education and training options, tracking participation and NEET rates, identifying and supporting NEET individuals or those at risk of becoming NEET, working with schools to identify pupils in need of targeted support, and paying particular attention to young people with SEND.

1.6.2. Careers Guidance – the increasing role of schools

Alongside the change in participation age, the responsibility for providing career information, advice and guidance has changed over the last 20 years, with a greater responsibility placed on schools over more recent years (Career Development Institute, 2017, May). Prior to 2012, a partnership model was used. Schools would offer career information and work experience and access an external government-funded service to provide career information, guidance, and targeted support. In England, this was provided by the Connexions Service, which ran from 2000 to 2012 before it was dismantled by the Coalition Government (outlined in the *Education Act 2011*). A similar model is still used in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland today (Career Development Institute, 2017). The change in England has meant that schools now have the responsibility to "secure access to impartial and independent careers guidance for every pupil in years 9 to 11" (DfE, 2011) (p1), indicating a move from a partnership-based approach to a school-led model (Careers Development Institute, 2017).

1.6.3. The recent careers statutory guidance and the role of "career leaders"

Recent statutory guidance has further raised the profile and accountability of schools in providing career guidance and education. In 2017, the Government published the new careers strategy, followed by statutory guidance in 2018 (updated in 2021). The statutory guidance, titled *Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: Statutory guidance for schools and guidance for further education colleges and sixth form colleges* (DfE, 2018b, 2021a), outlined the increased role of schools in providing independent career guidance to pupils. Specifically, each maintained and academy school was required to have a named "career leader" by September 2018, in charge of the delivery of the school's careers programme, involving:

1) Meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks (described in greater detail below)

2) Publishing their careers programme and post-16 education and training providers on their website.

3) Tracking the destinations of the young people after they have left school and using this to improve the effectiveness of the careers programme.

The updated guidance (*Careers guidance and access for education and training providers,* DfE, 2021a) offered no change to careers legislation from 2018 but announced greater accountability measures. It reported that the Ofsted School Inspection handbook would be updated to ensure schools were meeting the legislation requirements, meaning careers information, education, advice, and guidance would be a key area to inform Ofsted judgements on 'Personal Development'. The guidance also described that schools should work according to their statutory responsibility under the 'Baker Clause' to ensure they do not bias academic opportunities over technical ones. This responsibility was expanded further in *The Skills for Jobs* white paper (DfE 2021b), which argued for a need to increase higher-level technical qualifications in the UK. This argument was based on evaluations indicating, on average, those with a higher-level technical qualification earn more by 30 than those with a degree.

1.6.4. The Gatsby Benchmarks

The Gatsby Charitable Foundation produced the Gatsby Benchmarks for careers guidance in 2014 (Holman, 2014). These eight Benchmarks, listed below, were informed by research and international career guidance practices and aim to provide schools with a blueprint for good career guidance. In the guidance, one to three criteria are outlined for each of the eight Benchmarks which schools must meet in order to fulfil the individual Benchmarks.

1) A career programme that is embedded and understood by all staff, students, and parents.

2) Students and parents should receive high quality information about courses, professions, and work.

3) Advice and guidance that is tailored to individual students' needs.

4) Subject teaching should be linked to careers.

5) Students should be provided with opportunities to learn from employers and employees.

6) Students should have experiences of workplaces.

7) There should be opportunities for students to meet and learn from further and higher education, and apprenticeship settings.

8) Students should all have timely personal guidance from a careers adviser with professional qualifications.

1.6.5. A Preventative Approach to NEET

A focus within government publications and the literature has been on early intervention and preventative work (Public Health England, 2014; Learning & Work Institute, 2020). This focus is underpinned by an assumption that preventative strategies are more effective than intervention measures and therefore have a greater impact in reducing the negative mental health, physical health, and employment outcomes associated with time spent being NEET. Additionally, preventative measures are more cost-effective in reducing NEET than re-engagement strategies for young people who are already NEET (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018). Indeed, an analysis undertaken by the Audit Commission (2010) found a four to one financial advantage of focusing on prevention over re-engagement strategies. Other analyses have put this figure even higher at nine to one (New Economics Foundation, 2009).

A report by the Learning and Work Institute (2020) summarised several government policies and programmes that aligned with preventative approaches to support with the reduction of NEET:

- The introduction of Traineeships in 2013 to support with basic employment and apprenticeship skills for 16- to 24-year-olds.

- The Adult Education Budget in 2016 which included funding Level 1, 2, 3 qualifications for 19-year-olds and above who have few or no qualifications.

- The apprenticeship reforms in England and Wales in 2017 which set to improve the availability and quality of schemes and provide further incentives for employees to provide apprenticeships.

- Interestingly, the report also lists the 2011 16 to 19 Bursary Fund (replacing Education Maintenance Allowance) to support disadvantaged learners with education, including transport costs as a preventative measure. However, this is contentious given this policy change represents a cut in support for disadvantaged young people accessing post-16 education.

1.6.6. Summary of Relevant Policy & Context

Overall, recent statutory guidance has raised the profile and accountability of schools in providing career guidance and education. This change began with the move from a partnership-based approach, using an external government-funded service to provide career information, advice and guidance and targeted support, to a school-led model where schools are responsible for sourcing this support. Schools are now required to have an appointed career leader in school and are accountable for their adherence to the statutory guidance and the Gatsby Benchmarks. There has also been a focus within governmental reports on the importance of early intervention concerning NEET. Arguably, the emphasis on early intervention in reducing NEET and the greater responsibility placed on schools for career guidance evident in the literature and government policy infers significant responsibility for schools to reduce the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. These reasons highlight the timeliness of the current project in exploring the role that schools have in supporting pupils that are at risk of becoming NEET.

1.6.7. Critique of policies

Below I offer several critiques of governmental policy and responses to NEET reduction.

Short-termism & a lack of a joined-up approach

Maguire (2021) criticises government intervention programmes for often being time limited and underfunded. She argues that they focus on proving the programme to be successful as quickly as possible for political convenience rather than addressing the underlying barriers faced by NEET young people. She added that each of the four UK nations increasingly operate independently with little sharing of knowledge and policy initiatives. Additionally, austerity measures and budget cuts have resulted in reduced funding and provision across localities, which she argues results in an approach where access to intervention is subject to a young person's geographical location.

The 'knowledge economy' myth

Governments around the world, including in the UK, often act with the belief that the greater number of highly educated people, the greater benefits for the national economy (Coffield, 2000; Lorinc et al., 2020). Examples of relevant policies and initiatives include the raising of the participation age and approaches to increase the number of young people accessing university education (Lorinc et al., 2020). However, the notion is referred to as the "knowledge economy myth" (Coffield, 2000, p.241), as, in reality, the UK is not full of jobs that require degree-level qualifications. In fact, there is an availability of low skilled jobs that do not necessitate qualifications (Lorinc et al., 2020). It has been argued that policies that focus on acquiring greater qualifications lead to social congestion rather than mobility, with more applicants applying for scant jobs (Simmons et al., 2014; Brown, 2013). This system naturally deprivileges those with low-level qualifications and attainment (Lorinc et al., 2020).

It could be argued that the recent promotion of vocational and technical routes outlined in the Skills for Jobs white paper (DfE, 2021b) acknowledges this problem by encouraging young people to focus on a broader range of jobs and routes to employment. However, there is still a focus on reaching a basic level of attainment in Maths and English, making access to some of these training routes hard to reach for some young people.

Neoliberal agenda

Policies have been critiqued for being outcome-led and adhering to a neoliberal agenda that focuses on productivity for all for the sake of the economy (Lorinc et al., 2020; Wrigley, 2017). Neoliberalism is a term used to describe aspects of ideologies that are dominant in the UK and other international economies. For the purpose of this paper, I will be using the definition given by Harvey (2005), of:

"A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade." (p. 2-3).

Monbiot (2016) writes that within neoliberal ideologies, human relations are characterised by competition, where merits are rewarded, and insufficiency is punished. Youth through a neoliberal lens, is characterised as period of 'transition', where young people are expected to move linearly from education to work, with a focus on their individual responsibility to conform to normative ideals of adulthood (i.e., to go to university, get a job, and contribute to the economy) (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; McPherson, 2021). Those that do not conform to these ideals are then characterised as disengaged or at-risk.

Such an approach bears little acknowledgement that education, employment, or training may not be appropriate for some young people, and averts attention away from the needs of vulnerable young people.

Focus on individual factors

Government NEET policy has long been criticised for perpetuating a within-child deficit model, where NEET young people are often framed as lacking aspirations and at fault for their circumstances (Russell et al., 2011; Pemberton, 2008). This approach is problematic as it does not address cultural and societal factors (Russell et al., 2011; Pemberton, 2008). Hearne and Neary (2020) argue that little has changed in this regard with the current career strategy in England. They argue that the policy equates social mobility with good career guidance, where career guidance is assumed to address the systemic inequality within educational systems and

the labour market. They suggest this perpetuates a focus on creating change within the individual rather than addressing the social, community, and economic influences that may impact an individual's opportunities. They suggest this could create a system where individuals are exposed to a range of future possibilities which, in reality, they may never be able to achieve due to external social and systemic structures.

The capacity of schools

While the responsibility for schools to deliver career education and guidance has arguably increased, this has not been coupled with substantial funding. Andrews (2020) reports that very little additional funding has been made available to help schools develop their career programmes and meet the Gatsby Benchmarks. A lack of funding could lead to a disparity across schools, possibly impacting provision in more deprived areas. This additional responsibility also comes while schools are struggling with a lack of resourcing (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019) and high levels of stress and burnout amongst staff (Barnardo's, 2020).

1.7. Relevance to Educational Psychologists

There are several reasons why reducing and understanding NEET is a relevant area for EPs. As EPs primarily work in schools, an increase in the responsibility of schools in reducing NEET could translate to an increased role for EPs. This point is pertinent for the profession, as the young people who are more likely to become NEET (i.e., children in care, those with low attainment, or SEND) are students with whom EPs often support. Cockerill and Arnold (2018) suggest that the recent career guidance reforms and career leader role provide a valuable opportunity for EPs to work with schools and help shape the new role to support young people at risk of becoming NEET. Additionally, the Children and Families Act (2014) and accompanying SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) extended the statutory responsibility of the EP to work with young people in the 16-25 age range. Cockerill and Arnold (2018) suggest this change brings an exciting opportunity to consider an EPs role in working with this age group.

Additionally, it has been proposed that EPs have a key role in promoting social justice (Mackay, 2002; Schulze et al., 2017). Social justice involves a society that meets the needs of and promotes participation of all groups equally and fairly (Bell et al., 1997). As indicated by the discussed NEET statistics, risk factors and associated outcomes, not everyone is equally likely to become NEET, and there are negative outcomes associated with time spent as NEET. NEET is, therefore, a social justice issue that impacts young people and, as such, is relevant to the EP profession.

Several ideas have been proposed in the literature for the role of EPs in reducing NEET. Morris & Atkinson (2018) explored the role of EPs in post-16. The review highlighted that a small number of studies had explored an EPs role in identifying and supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET, which will be expanded upon in the Literature Review Chapter. Cockerill and Arnold (2018) have also identified that EPs have much to offer regarding psychological skills and understanding. They argue that while a focus on characteristics of the NEET population can be helpful, it does not consider the psychological aspects that contribute to becoming NEET. For instance, being in care does not cause a young person to become NEET but rather a range of co-existing vulnerabilities and contextual factors. They argue that EPs are well placed to bring psychological perspectives and theories of adolescent development to understand the mechanisms linking risk factors with NEET status. They added that EPs could apply psychological skills to elicit young people's voices and inner world and support with transition planning. Research into the role of EPs in NEET will be expanded upon in the Literature Review Chapter.

1.8. Summary of Chapter

This chapter has indicated that the topic of NEET is a social justice issue. Certain groups of young people who are already vulnerable are more likely to become NEET, and there is a range of adverse outcomes associated with being NEET. The current policy places a greater responsibility of career education and guidance on schools and advocates for early intervention to reduce NEET. With their role in working with schools and vulnerable young people and

understanding of adolescent development, EPs potentially have much to offer in the area, highlighting the topic's relevance to the profession. The following chapter will provide a literature review exploring what is known about the experiences and support offered to NEET and at-risk of NEET young people.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature on the experiences and support for NEET young people and those at risk of NEET. When approaching my literature review, before defining my search terms, I explored the literature broadly to ascertain the previous reviews and research that focused on the recent governmental career guidance. I then used my examination of these pieces of literature to inform my approach to the literature search.

I will start by summarising and critiquing key review papers on the topic of NEET. Then, I will explore research conducted into the Gatsby Benchmarks and the current career guidance (DfE, 2021a). Next, I will outline my approach to the systematic literature review, which seeks to answer two questions (Q1 & 2):

Q1. What is known about the experiences of NEET and "at-risk" of NEET individuals and the support offered to them?

Q2. What does research suggest the role of EPs is in reducing NEET?

The literature will be critically considered, with implications discussed. I will then explore the findings from the literature review with reference to two psychological theories: Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner 1995) and Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

As stated in the Introduction Chapter, NEET is a governmental category used to describe young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment, or training. When considering the literature discussed in this chapter, it is important to remember that the NEET definition has changed over time. Initially, it referred to 16–18-year-olds, but this was extended to 24 in 2011 (HM Government, 2011). Additionally, the compulsory age that young people were legally required to remain in education and training was raised from 16 to 18 in 2013 (DfE, 2016). These changes in the definition and legislation will have impacted the context of some of the research discussed in this chapter.

2.1. Previous literature reviews

In preparation for my literature review, I considered reviews that had already been conducted on the topic. The aim was threefold: to understand what was already known about the topic, critically consider approaches taken to reviewing the literature, and avoid replicating approaches so that my literature review made a useful contribution to the topic.

Initial explorations of the literature highlighted three recent published reviews focusing on research into NEET. Two of the reviews took a systematic approach to explore the evidence for interventions to reduce NEET. One of these reviews concentrated on collating research on preventative strategies to reduce NEET (Learning & Work Institute, 2020). The other focused on intervention strategies to support re-engagement (Mawn et al., 2017). The third review summarised evidence from various sources to broadly explore what works in reducing NEET figures (Public Health England, 2014). This section will report on the approaches, findings, strengths, and limitations of these reviews.

The Learning and Work Institute review (2020) explored international studies (2010-2020) that focused on interventions to support attainment, employment, progress, and engagement for 15- to 24-year-olds. 57 studies were included in the paper. The review found that 24 studies were Randomised Control Trials, 12 studies used a comparison group, and 21 used a non-experimental design. The evidence across these studies indicated a range of effective approaches to reduce the risk of young people becoming NEET. In particular, flexible and tailored support was most effective in supporting attainment, employment, progress, and engagement. There was also evidence of the effectiveness of targeting transition points, such as at ages 16 and 18. The key facilitators found were supporting personal skills and aspirations and offering work experience and vocational training. Incentive-based programmes were also indicated to have some positive effects. The report summarised an overall scarcity of evidence, specifically into outcomes for disadvantaged groups and support at key transition points.

Mawn et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of re-engagement interventions that targeted NEET young people. Eighteen trials were included in the review (international studies conducted from 1990 to 2016). Interventions included in-class and school based, therapeutic, vocational, internships, social skills, and monetary support. The review found some evidence for positive outcomes for employment where interventions were high contact (e.g. six months) or involved multi-component approaches. However, evidence for increased education or training was inconsistent. The paper stated that the current quality of evidence is limited, and even high-quality interventions had limited impact.

The review by Public Health England (2014) summarised findings from local authority evaluations, international case studies, and some academic references to explore what works in reducing the number of young people who are NEET. Six key strategies for reducing NEET were outlined as effective: 1) Early intervention before 16; 2) Supporting young people to overcome other barriers contributing to their NEET status, such as housing needs or substance misuse; 3) Multiagency approaches and working across geographical boundaries; 4) Involving local employers; 5) Tracking NEET and the effectiveness of programmes; 6) Interventions that are based on features of other successful programmes, including:

- Offering attractive and engaging courses while simultaneously providing useful skills and formal accreditation.

- Providing provision that is "not like school" (p. 34), such as youth work or non-hierarchal approaches.

- Involving young people in designing the provision or programme,

- The use of financial incentives and funds to support programme-related costs and resources.

- Offering small group sizes and one-to-one support.

- Helping young people to manage transitions.

Critique of reviews

The reviews provide some implications for effective preventative and re-engagement approaches to reducing NEET. Effective prevention strategies included early intervention, holistic and multiagency approaches, and monitoring and tracking (Public Health England, 2014). Flexible and tailored preventative approaches that are aimed at key transition points and focus on developing skills and experiences were also shown to be beneficial (Learning & Work Institute, 2020). Additionally, the importance of ensuring programmes are designed with the needs of the young person in mind was highlighted (Public Health England, 2014). In terms of re-engagement interventions, high contact and multi-component approaches were found most effective for increasing the likelihood of future employment. However, the evidence was limited overall, especially for education and training outcomes (Mawn et al., 2017). Despite these implications, the reviews have some limitations, as explored below.

Firstly, all the reviews included research conducted outside of the UK. Only five of the eighteen studies in Mawn et al. (2017) and twenty-six of the fifty-eight in the Public Health England (2014) review were conducted in the UK. It was not possible to determine where all the studies included in the Learning and Work Institute (2019) report were conducted due to the lack of detail on these aspects in the publication. However, evidence from several different countries was described. The approaches used in these reviews make the findings difficult to generalise to the UK due to different policies and educational structures used internationally.

Secondly, the reviews by Public Health England (2014) and Mawn et al. (2017) focused on intervention effectiveness and excluded smaller scale exploratory studies. The review by Mawn et al. (2017) took a positivist approach and only included randomised and quasi-randomised trials with a control group and baseline equivalence. The review by Public Health England (2014) included experimental and non-experimental studies but excluded studies where the programmes did not include an evaluation, or the sample sizes were too small. These

approaches mean that in-depth exploratory studies that could have offered new understanding or more profound insight into what it means to be NEET or receive support were not included.

Thirdly, contrastingly to the other papers, the Learning and Work Institute (2019) took a broad approach to its inclusion criteria that lacked transparency. This approach resulted in several limitations. The report gave no outlined inclusion criteria or explanation of how literature was selected to be part of the review. A range of research was drawn on - from case study examples of programmes used in Canada to small scale local pilots. The omission of inclusion and exclusion criteria means the review could be biased regarding what was cited. Additionally, the research was examined descriptively with little reference to methodological approaches or critique, making it difficult to infer the quality of the evidence included in the review.

Fourthly, all the reviews focused on formal intervention and prevention programmes rather than research into supportive and inhibitive factors for young people within their natural environments such as school, the community, and home. Finally, all three reviews offered no description of a theoretical basis to understand the mechanisms that may lead to NEET or why approaches may be effective. These limitations will be drawn upon in the section outlining my approach to the literature review.

2.2. Research into the current career strategy

I also explored research into the current statutory guidance to explore what is already known about the implementation and impact of the policy and how this may relate to NEET prevention.

Research conducted by the Gatsby Foundation and the Careers Enterprise Company explored the implementation and impact of the policy. An initial survey of 750 career leaders across the country found that career leaders occupied a range of roles within schools (Tanner et al., 2019). The highest proportion were teachers (33%), some were work experience coordinators, some were departmental heads, and a small number had roles such as SENDCos and librarians. The survey also found differences in seniority. 27% were on the senior leadership team, 30%

were at a middle leadership level, 22% were at a coordinator level, and 6% were at an administrator level. The survey indicates the role is occupied by people with a range of job titles, each with varying amounts of responsibility and autonomy in the school. Such variation could mean a disparity in the quality of career support across schools. Additionally, Andrews and Hooley (2017) argue that professionals moving into the role already have a professional identity, so they may struggle to reconcile this with their new responsibilities.

Despite the disparity in how the role is filled across schools, the participants reported positive outcomes. 88% of careers leaders felt their role positively impacted young people's outcomes, 75% agreed that careers provision has improved since the new guidance, and 81% indicated that they felt hopeful about the future of careers in schools. These findings suggest that the current statutory guidance and role is perceived to have a positive impact by career leaders. However, it is important to note that those who had time to respond to the survey and were motivated to do so may have been more likely to respond positively. Hence, it is difficult to infer how representative the findings are of all people in the role. Additionally, the extent that career leaders are impartial is questionable. They may have been motivated to present their work as effective for a number of reasons, which could have skewed the data towards a favourable representation. Furthermore, the survey also gives no follow-up questions, nor does it ask questions about barriers or facilitators to conducting the work, so it does not indicate what aspects of the role are beneficial.

Another report by The Careers and Enterprise Company (2021) presents trends in careers education delivered in the 2020/21 academic year from 3893 secondary schools and colleges across England (equalling 78% of all maintained schools and colleges). The data indicated several positive trends. Career education was found to be more prominent within the curriculum since the introduction of the updated government guidance. There was also an increase in the number of students who received one-to-one personal guidance (80% in secondary schools and 65% in specialist provisions). Additionally, a positive association was found between the number

of Benchmarks achieved and the likelihood of young people being in a provision post-16 (each Benchmark was estimated to increase the likelihood by 1.5%), indicating the new strategy is helping to reduce NEET figures.

However, there were also some less positive outcomes. Fewer students received work experience than previous years (related to the pandemic). Also, despite schools reporting increased information around apprenticeships, this was not met with a greater uptake. An important finding was that, on average, schools only achieved four Gatsby Benchmarks, which raises questions about what is preventing them from achieving more. A strength of this research is that it was based on an extensive database of schools. However, the data gives little understanding of what the new guidance feels like for those implementing or receiving the support.

The International Centre for Guidance Studies also evaluated the Gatsby Benchmarks (Hanson et al., 2021), through a four-year analysis of 16 schools and colleges in Northeast England that used the framework. The study found several positive outcomes, including an increase in 'student career readiness scores' (an indicator of work preparedness) and a correlation between the number of benchmarks met and GCSE passes (when demographic variables such as SEND and family income were controlled for). Additionally, an increase in students achieving their outcomes, engagement in class, and understanding the reasons behind their learning was observed. Employers also found that young people were better informed of possible careers and more able to communicate their ideas.

Overall, while research into the career strategy has suggested several positive impacts, including a reduction in NEET for schools implementing the Benchmarks, the research is primarily based on survey responses and numerical indicators. Therefore, the results do not give a deeper insight into what it is like for staff in the new role, nor how they feel their role relates to supporting those at risk of becoming NEET.

2.3. Approach to current literature review

The existing evidence reviews brought together research that offers some implications for practice in reducing NEET. However, for my literature review, I was also interested in finding out what it is like to be NEET, what school was like for NEET individuals, and how formal and non-formal support systems are experienced by those who are NEET and those giving support. With these aims in mind, and the limitations of previous reviews, I was interested in conducting a literature review that was a) inclusive of research that explored in-depth accounts, b) included research into formal and informal support systems, c) based on research that was conducted in the UK only, while also, d) rigorous and transparent in its approach.

I decided that a qualitative systematic review would fit the above criteria. This approach would bring together primary qualitative studies which other reviews may not have included. Qualitative literature reviews can help to reveal new understanding, uncover *why*, and contribute towards a theoretical basis (Seers, 2015). It was important that I used a systematic approach to ensure I understood what is already known about the topic and to make conclusions about the literature. These implications could also then inform the strategies taken in my research.

As stated previously, my literature review asked the following questions:

Q1. What is known about the experiences of NEET and "at-risk" of NEET individuals and the support offered to them?

Q2. What does research suggest the role of EPs is in reducing NEET?

2.3.1. Literature Search

A qualitative literature review based on systematic search principles was conducted. Eligible studies were selected on 06.01.2022 using five databases: Web of Science, British Educational Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and PsycINFO. I also manually searched Google Scholar and retrieved papers through snowballing. As my search resulted in few results related to EPs, an additional manual search was conducted on Ethos for theses on the topic of NEET from the EP literature.

The following search terms were used: *NEET, "not in education",* and *"education employment or training".* These terms were selected after deep engagement with the literature and exploration using other terms. The topic of NEET is broad and interrelated with a number of topics. I explored the literature on related areas using search terms such as "*youth unemployment", "transition", "disengaged youth*", and "*career guidance*". However, these terms led to an unmanageably high number of papers and would have taken the literature review on a less focused and coherent path. I decided I needed to put boundaries in place and retain the focus on NEET and studies that had explicitly and deliberately focused on the topic area. By using the following search terms: *NEET, "not in education",* and *"education employment or training",* it was possible to focus on studies where the experiences of NEET young people and those offering support were a focal part of the study. This approached allowed for a focused and rich exploration into what is understood about the experiences of NEET young people.

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select papers that matched my search terms:

Inclusion Criteria

1) a primary qualitative study (including mixed methods).

2) published during or after the year 2002.

3) published in a peer-reviewed journal, unpublished doctoral thesis, or textbook.

4) based in the UK.

5) Focused on the experiences of NEET young people, those "at-risk" of NEET*, relevant professionals and those giving support.

6) 'NEET' explicitly mentioned in the abstract or formed a focal part of the study.

Exclusion criteria

1) Research into young people in jobs without training.

2) Focused on the needs of specific groups of SEND (for example, autism).

3) Duplicate pieces of research (where research papers reflected on their research in several different papers, the original or one with the broadest oversight was included, and the others were excluded).

* The term "at-risk" is used here, and in the remainder of the literature review, where the authors of a paper have identified that a young person is considered at-risk of NEET. There are no nationally agreed upon measures to determine whether a young person is at-risk of becoming NEET, although several possible risk assessment tools have been suggested (for instance, see Arnold & Baker, 2013). Therefore, for practical and ethical reasons, it was decided that papers would be included if the authors identified the young person as at risk of NEET. Including papers with participants that I identified as at-risk of NEET based on variables or risk factors would have been problematic without fully knowing the context of the participants.

A total of 34 papers were included in the review. For transparency, my full literature search strategy is displayed in the appendices. Refer to Appendix A for a flow diagram representing my search strategy, completed in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Appendix B displays a table of the reasons for excluding papers. Appendix C contains a table of all studies included in the literature review, with the research focus, participants, design, analytic approach, findings and critique of each of the studies outlined.

Thematic Construction of the Literature

After I had selected the papers that I wanted to include in my review, I considered how to present the literature in a meaningful, coherent way. I used an approach that Rennison and Hart (2022) refer to as a *thematically constructed literature review* (p. 81). This approach allowed me to organise the literature in a way that highlighted commonalities within the literature and helped set the scene and rationale for my research. First, I immersed myself in the papers. I read each article, highlighted important aspects, made notes, and wrote a summary on the paper and its key findings in relation to my literature search questions. I then grouped the papers into their primary

area of focus; papers that focused on young people that were identified as at-risk of NEET, those who were or had been NEET, and those from EP literature. Some studies fitted into more than one group. I then used my summaries to find common themes within the literature, which I grouped together in a separate document. I then reread papers and considered their contribution to these themes, adding to and refining themes as I went. I approached this with my values as a social justice researcher. I focused my themes on the experiences of the participants in the studies, the support they received and found helpful, and the barriers within this support. I wanted to give voice to the nuanced experiences of the participants in the studies, considering the equity of their situations and measures taken to support their inclusion.

Appraisal of the Literature

Studies were appraised using two stages. First, I used the Qualitative Checklist from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (2018). The CASP assesses the quality of the studies based on qualitative measures of the validity of results i.e., approaches to recruitment, the extent the way the data was collected, the considerations around researcher and participant relationship, the approach to analysis, and reflections on and presentation of findings. The CASP also considers the impact of the findings in terms of their usefulness. Critical appraisal tools offer a systematic approach to evaluating research. The CASP was selected over other tools due to its suitability to qualitative research and accessibility for novice researchers (Majid & Vanstone, 2018). Using the CASP meant that I was able to see common strengths, and limitations within the literature. An example of a completed CASP checklist is provided in Appendix D.

In addition to using the CASP checklist, I appraised the literature specifically in the context of the usefulness and relevance to my literature search questions, taking into account factors such as when the research was conducted and in what context. This approach gave me a contextualised understanding of what is known around the topic and helped me to identify areas for future study.

I made notes of the most poignant and important limitations and strengths from these two processes and summarised this in final column of the table in Appendix C. This approach meant that I was able to see common strengths, limitations, and gaps within the literature.

2.4. Outline of Systematic Literature Review

The literature review will be split into two main parts. First, I will address the first question, "What is known about the experiences of NEET and "at-risk" of NEET individuals and the support offered to them?". The literature on this topic can be divided into several categories: research focusing on those that are NEET, those seen as "at-risk" of NEET, and the support offered during these periods. The support provided for those "at-risk" of NEET can be considered preventative approaches, and the support offered to those currently NEET can be viewed as re-engagement interventions. I start by summarising young people's experiences of being NEET and then the barriers and facilitators experienced within re-engagement strategies and support. Next, I discuss research into the experiences of young people identified as "at-risk" of NEET and the barriers and facilitators associated with preventative support. For each of these sections, research will be drawn upon that includes the views of young people and relevant professionals. I then summarise the literature and offer a critique.

Then, I will address my second literature question: "What does research suggest the role of EPs is in reducing NEET?". I discuss what the research has suggested in terms of the role of EPs in reducing NEET and then offer a critique of the literature and identify gaps.

Then, I apply the findings to two psychological models and offer conclusions based on the literature.

2.4.1. Q1. What is known about the experiences of NEET and "at-risk" of NEET individuals and the support offered to them?

I start this section by exploring the experiences of NEET young people, then the facilitators and barriers within their support. I then use an identical format to explore the literature on those identified as "at-risk" of NEET.

Experiences of being NEET

Several studies have explored the experiences of young people within the NEET category. These studies have focused on capturing the views of the young person using a range of approaches, including ethnographic studies (Simmons et al., 2014; Simmons et al., 2020), semi-structured interviews (Lawy & Wheeler, 2013; Maguire, 2018; Lorinc et al., 2020; Gabriel, 2015), and creative approaches using drama, video, and photo-elicitation (Finlay et al., 2010).

These studies concur with research into the risk factors associated with the NEET category. Young people had a range of vulnerability characteristics, such as mental health needs, SEND, physical illness, low academic attainment, young parents, care leavers, and low socioeconomic status (Simmons et al., 2014; Lorinc et al., 2020; Simmons et al., 2020; Arnold & Baker, 2013; Maguire, 2018; Gabriel, 2015). The studies also highlighted the heterogeneity of the NEET category. Not all NEET young people had low academic attainment (Maguire, 2018; Lorinc et al., 2020; Simmons et al., 2014; Pemberton, 2008), nor were from low-income families (Lawy & Wheeler, 2013; Lorinc et al., 2020), and some had experienced time in post-16 opportunities and paid employment (Maguire, 2018; Lorinc et al., 2020; Simmons et al., 2020). These studies illuminate a strength of qualitative approaches, highlighting that they can offer a more nuanced picture beyond risk factors.

The qualitative approaches used in the studies also meant that the authors were able to explore the views of young people in terms of what they perceived led to them becoming NEET. A common theme was negative experiences at school. Many participants had experienced disruption to their schooling, such as truancy and school exclusion (Simmons et al., 2014;

Simmons et al., 2020; Finlay et al., 2010). Participants in Finlay et al.'s study (2010) spoke of finding lessons hard, having difficulties concentrating, and needing more breaks. Young people in the studies by Lorinc et al. (2020) and Gabriel (2015) discussed a lack of support in school for needs relating to SEND and mental health, issues of bullying, and a lack of careers and further education guidance. Participants discussed the negative impacts of school on their self-concept and perceptions of the possible opportunities post-16 (Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021; Wenham, 2020).

As well as negative school experiences, young people discussed situational and contextual barriers. Young people in many of the studies lived in areas of deprivation which impacted job opportunities and quality of schooling (Simmons et al., 2014, Simmons et al., 2020; Maguire, 2018; Wenham, 2020). In the paper by Simmons et al. (2014), young people had poor labour market experiences with many cycling between low wages and unemployment and a lack of high-quality education and training for those with low academic attainment. In Wenham's (2020) study, young people described poverty in the area, attending a "failing coastal school" (p. 14), and unstable and low paid work opportunities. Similarly, in Lorinc et al.'s study, participants spoke of poverty, high living costs, competitive job markets, and challenges in balancing study and work. Maguire (2018) explored the experiences of NEET young women. She found these women faced barriers such as challenges securing and funding reliable childcare and finding employment. Lawy and Wheeler's (2013) study found that participants' financial, social, and cultural resources and connections impacted their hopes, aspirations, and opportunities.

Participants in several studies also experienced a lack of feasible access to transport and poor travel links linked to deprivation, which impacted on the accessibility of education and employment opportunities (Simmons et al., 2014; Wenham, 2020), highlighting a structural barrier that young people had little control over.

The experiences of the young people in these studies highlight the structural barriers that impact NEET status, including a lack of support in school, a lack of career advice, poor job and

post-16 opportunities, and living in deprived areas. Raising awareness of these structural barriers is valuable and goes against the assumption that young people are NEET because of a lack of aspirations (Pemberton, 2008). Several of the studies explicitly rejected this assumption. Simmons et al. (2014) and Finlay et al. (2010) found that participants had typical aspirations: to have a family, a home, and job stability. However, the studies also found that participants' aspirations were humble and impacted by their perception of the available opportunities (Lawy & Wheeler, 2013; Wenham, 2020; Simmons et al., 2014). For instance, Simmons et al. (2014, 2020) found that repeated negative experiences impacted young people's agency and belief in what they could achieve in employment or education, which the authors suggested had a demotivating impact over time. Several of the studies noted that even though participants were aware of structural factors such as poverty and labour market opportunities, they seemed to see themselves as the causes of their situation (Simmons et al., 2014), with some expressing regret at the choices they had made (Gabriel, 2015).

As well as highlighting structural barriers impacting young people's situation, the studies indicate the emotional impact of being NEET on young people. Feelings of exclusion and isolation were common within the literature. Young people described societal pressures to go to university and prioritise education and employment (Rose et al., 2012). Participants also discussed relationships with peers and professionals that made them feel rejected, isolated, and powerless (Rose et al., 2012). Young people in Miller et al.'s (2015) study described feelings of negativity directed towards them from societal structures such as education, police, libraries, gyms, and shops. These instances affected young people's belief in fairness, engendered resentment, and led to young people using strategies to isolate themselves from these structures. In Gabriel's study (2015), young people described feelings of insecurity, isolation, low mood and self-esteem and, and being "trapped" (p. 177).

Overall, the research into the experiences of young people within the NEET category highlights that familial, contextual, school-based, and structural barriers impact the young

people's situation and opportunities. The research also highlights the impact of these processes on young peoples' emotional state, sense of belonging and inclusion, with some internalising their situation as rooted in personal decisions. In the next section, I explore research into the support offered to NEET young people.

NEET young people's experiences of re-engagement interventions & support

A range of studies focused on the support offered to NEET young people. These studies used approaches such as ethnographic (Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Cornish, 2018; Wignall, 2019; Phillips, 2010), semi-structured interviews (Miller et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2012; Robertson, 2018; Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021; Buchanan & Tucker, 2016; Gabriel, 2015), creative methods (Hanrahan et al., 2020), observations (Buchanan & Tucker, 2016), and mixed methods (Hazenberg et al., 2014). The type of support included educational courses for basic qualifications (Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Cornish, 2018; Smith & Wright, 2015), government-funded initiatives such as the previous Connexions service (Philips, 2010), youth groups (Wignall, 2019; Miller et al., 2015), intervention programmes focused on specific skills such as computing (Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021; Buchanan & Tucker, 2016), and employability (Robertson, 2018), and research that explored how young people experienced support overall through periods of being NEET (Rose et al., 2012; Hanrahan et al., 2020; Hazenberg et al., 2014; Gabriel, 2015).

This section will first explore the facilitating factors in the support identified in the literature and then the barriers.

Facilitators within the support for NEET young people

  1) Relationship-based, tailored approaches

The research into NEET re-engagement interventions consistently highlighted that relationships and a nurturing environment are important aspects of the support. This finding was evident in discussions with and observations of tutors and learners on the courses for students who would otherwise have been NEET (Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Avila & Rose, 2019; Beck, 2015). It was also evident in the research into youth projects and intervention groups. The studies

found that the nurturing, tailored, and relationship-focused atmosphere afforded in these youth and intervention groups were crucial elements of change for the confidence and empowerment of young people (Wignall, 2019; Miller et al., 2015; Robertson, 2018; Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021; Phillips, 2010). The professionals interviewed in Gabriel's (2015) study also recognised their role in offering supportive relational and tailored approaches, advocating for the young person, and being a mediator between the young person and their work, training, or education provider.

2) Learning & personal growth

Alongside these relationship-based approaches, the young people across the studies benefitted from learning new skills and gaining new experiences in diverse areas, including sports (Miller et al., 2015), media (Miller et al., 2015, Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021), employability (Phillips, 2010; Robertson, 2018), community opportunities, work experience (Robertson, 2018), confidence-building (Robertson, 2018; Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021), and employability skills such as good communication and teamwork (Gabriel, 2015). In several of the papers, it was suggested that it was not so much the type of learning on offer (e.g., sports or media) that acted as a 'magic ingredient' but rather that young people felt empowered through learning a new skill and, importantly, that this occurred in an environment that met their emotional needs (Miller et al., 2015; Robertson, 2018; Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021).

3) Support from family, friends & the community

Several of the studies also indicated that support did not always come from formal organisations or professionals and that the bonds with family members and friends were also significant in offering both practical and emotional support (Rose et al., 2012; Buchanan & Tuckerman, 2016; Phillips, 2010; Gabriel, 2015). Also, relational bonds with friends and community members were fostered through some of the youth work interventions, with young people in several of the studies forming friendships and new connections within the nurturing environments (Miller et al., 2015; Robertson, 2018; Wignall, 2019).

4) Flexibility

An additional facilitative factor was where programmes moved away from rigid processes and formal structures. For instance, Hanrahan et al. (2020) found that care leavers discussed being able to move away from strict educational timescales as a vital factor in their success. Similarly, Hazenberg et al. (2014) compared a social enterprise company and a for-profit company offering support to NEET young people. They found no difference in the formal outcomes of the programmes. However, the social enterprise company took on individuals with a higher level of need and was able to drift away from strict mission objectives more freely than the for-profit company. This approach resulted in the support offered to a broader range of young people.

5) Practical support

Professionals in Gabriel's study (2015) discussed practical support such as offering transport costs, work clothes and resources as helpful. This finding links with the review by Public Health England (2014), which indicated the effectiveness of financial incentives and resources to support with education, training or work.

Barriers in the support for NEET young people

1) The nature of the courses & learning provisions

The studies also highlighted barriers in terms of the nature of the courses and the learning provisions for young people who would otherwise be NEET. Both Cornish (2018) and Simmons and Thompson (2011) found that there was an assumption towards low academic ability and vocational routes, with students prevented from taking more academic options such as GCSEs, even when they expressed a desire to do so. Simmons and Thompson (2011) described the course was regarded as a "sink course" (p.449) by parents and students. The building itself was in an isolated spot away from mainstream learning, which the authors argue added to the segregation.

2) Teaching

The studies also highlighted problems within teaching practice. Cornish (2018) argued that there was a culture of "warehousing" where tutors focused on keeping students busy rather than teaching them skills to achieve, which resulted in disruptive behaviour and disengagement amongst students. The literacy teachers interviewed in Smith & Wright's study (2015) also described a low level of engagement amongst students. The teachers attributed this disengagement to the style of teaching – which focused on technical aspects such as grammar and word classes rather than a more innovative curriculum. Both Beck (2015) and Simmons and Thompson (2011) described that tutors often had low qualifications compared to teachers and were described to have low pay and status.

Both Beck (2015) and Avila & Rose (2019) found that the learning providers they spoke to held low expectations of what NEET young people might achieve and were open with students about labour market constraints. The authors argue that the negative outlooks of these practitioners could have formed an additional barrier for young people.

3) *Rigidity, funding & resourcing*

Several of the authors recognised that some of the limitations within these programmes were influenced by a broader situation, where companies were working towards specific outcomes such as having young people in a setting and meeting a certain level of qualification, rather than focusing on what may have been best for the young people (Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Cornish, 2018). Similarly, teachers in Smith and Wright's (2015) study described being limited by existing funding and assessment regimes which dictated a prescriptive curriculum (Smith & Wright, 2015). Additionally, in Gabriel (2015), professionals described that what they were able to offer was significantly impacted by changes in resourcing and responsibilities, which affected the stability of programmes and narrowed referral criteria.

Now that I have explored the experiences of being NEET and the support offered, I will summarise the literature on the experiences of young people identified as "at-risk" of NEET and the facilitators and barriers in their support.

The experiences of young people identified as "at-risk" of NEET

As previously discussed, due to there not being a nationally agreed definition of young people who are "at-risk" of NEET, rather than relying on a specific criteria, studies were included where the authors had identified the young person as "at-risk". Studies focused on young people viewed as "at-risk" of NEET for reasons such as having difficulties in attending school, disengagement in their learning, or having received fixed-term or permanent exclusions (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Riaz, 2018; Ryan et al., 2019). These studies used case study approaches (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Duffy & Elwood, 2013), semi-structured interviews (Riaz, 2018), and mixed-methods (Ryan et al., 2019).

Similarly to the experiences of young people currently NEET, these studies indicated that young people identified as "at-risk" of NEET described negative experiences of schooling. In Duffy & Elwood's (2013) study, participants described poor relationships with teachers and feeling different from other students (for example, some felt that they could not compete with high attaining pupils). The young people in Cajic-Seigneur and Hodgson (2016) described that when attending mainstream school, they felt they were treated like "children" by teachers. Additionally, academic subjects were considered uninteresting with little relevance to the world of work. Riaz (2018), who explored the experiences of black and minority ethnic Muslim students, found that half of the participants felt they were treated differently by staff and were not given the support they needed to prepare for transition and post-16. Ryan et al. (2019) also found that individuals described other factors outside of the school environment, such as changes at home, family breakdowns or needing to relocate, which affected young people's engagement with school.

However, similarly to the discussions with young people currently NEET, not all of those identified as "at-risk" of NEET discussed negative school experiences. Some reflected on both the positives and negatives of schooling. Students described positive relationships with school staff and friends, high-quality teaching, and teachers who valued vocational subjects as well as academic ones (Duffy & Elwood, 2013; Riaz, 2018). Duffy and Elwood (2013) argue that this

mixed picture indicates that disengagement is fluid and not fixed, with a changeable landscape of inhibitive and supportive factors.

Below I explore support and preventative programmes for young people identified as "at risk" of NEET.

Experiences of support & preventative programmes for young people identified as "at-risk" of NEET

A number of studies have focused on the experiences of support within school and preventative programmes for young people "at-risk" of NEET. These studies include a mixed-method study exploring what young people found supportive (Ryan et al., 2019), a case study of young people's experiences of moving to an alternative provision (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016), large-scale government-funded evaluations of the Connexions Service involving semi-structured interviews (Hoggarth & Smith 2004), case-studies that focused on KS4 targeted support (McCrone, & Bamford 2016), and semi-structured interviews with professionals (Brown, 2021) and young people on what helps (Currie & Goodall, 2009)

Facilitators within the support for those "at-risk" of NEET

1) Relationships & support from significant others

Similarly, to the research into NEET young people, "at-risk" of NEET young people and relevant professionals identified relationships with teachers and professionals delivering preventative programmes and peers as supportive (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Ryan et al., 2019; McCrone, & Bamford 2016; Arnold & Baker, 2013). One study found that teachers were the most important factor for school engagement. Ryan et al. (2019) sent an initial survey to students in a high-risk area of NEET and found that school engagement was most strongly correlated with perceived teacher support, while also finding lesser, but significant relationships with parental support, and peer support. These findings were supported and expanded upon by the qualitative interviews. In terms of support from teachers, young people tended to refer to a singular staff member who they regard as particularly important and helpful.

In terms of parental support, participants mostly expressed receiving support but some discussed difficulties at home and feeling unsupported. Peer support was mixed, with interviewees discussing both positive and negative influences.

2) Formal learning & personal growth

Similarly to the literature focused on NEET young people, studies of those "at-risk" of NEET and relevant professionals also highlighted the importance of formal learning and opportunities for personal growth. Young people in Cajic-Seigneur and Hodgson (2016) discussed wanting to acquire necessary qualifications and spoke particularly highly of learning that felt relevant to post-16 and vocational options. Young people in Currie and Goodall (2009) identified the importance of effective work experience and career support in school. Professionals in Brown (2021) spoke of supporting young people's decision making and equipping them with skills for adult life. Both the studies by Hoggarth and Smith (2004) and McCrone and Bamford (2016) found that discussions with professionals and young people indicated the importance of both measurable outcomes such as moving into post-16 opportunities, and personal outcomes such as growth, developing skills, and an increased understanding of the relevance of their studies.

3) Early identification & multiagency working

Early identification was also supportive and worked best when it involved multiagency working (Brown, 2021; Hoggarth & Smith, 2004). For instance, Hoggarth and Smith found that professionals felt the work was most effective when they could work jointly with schools.

Barriers in the support for those "at-risk" of NEET

1) Rigidity

Discussions with young people and professionals in the research by Hoggarth and Smith (2004) indicated an overly rigid focus on the NEET target and pressure to attend what was sometimes unsuitable opportunities after school.

2) A lack of early identification

Several studies indicated a lack of early identification to support "at-risk" young people. Hoggarth and Smith (2004) found that practitioners did not feel they always correctly identified those most in need. Currie and Goodall (2009) also asked practitioners how they identified who may be "at-risk" of becoming NEET, but no clear strategy was suggested.

3) **The capacity of services, funding, and availability of opportunities.**

Professionals in the study by Brown (2021) stated several barriers in their work, including budgeting and time restrictions, coordinating professionals for multiagency working, difficulties in engaging some young people and families, a lack of opportunities post-16, and the impact of the pandemic on young people's access to support and disruptions to their education. Hoggarth and Smith (2004) also found that the Connexions advisors had limited capacity and had to stop some support early. Professionals in Gabriel (2015) questioned the capacity and knowledge of schools to provide information for young people given their other commitments and pressures.

2.4.2. Summary for Q1: What is known about the experiences of NEET and "at-risk" of NEET young people and the support offered to them?

Overall, the research into the experiences of young people within the NEET category and those identified as "at-risk" of NEET highlights that individual, familial, contextual, school-based, and structural barriers impact young people's situations and opportunities. A particularly prominent theme in the research was the impact of negative school experiences on young people and the importance of support from teachers during this period. This finding implies that school experiences are essential in understanding and reducing NEET. Specifically, that school is a time that can lead to disengagement while also being an opportunity for young people to receive support. The literature review also highlights the impact these processes have on young peoples' emotional state, sense of belonging and inclusion.

The research into re-engagement interventions and support offered to NEET young people, and the preventative support offered to those "at-risk" of NEET indicated similar facilitators and barriers within the support during both periods. Relationships with teachers, those delivering

programmes, and friends and family were significant for both NEET and "at-risk" of NEET individuals. Similarly, support that involved formal qualifications, personal growth, flexibility and multiagency opportunities were found to be facilitative at both time points. Early identification was indicated as important in research into preventative support.

In terms of barriers in offering support, there were also similarities found in the literature for support for NEET young people and those "at-risk" of becoming NEET. These barriers included rigidity in the support offered, a lack of capacity, and low funding for programmes. Additionally, a lack of early identification was found to impact on the support for those "at-risk" of NEET. Finally, educational courses offered for those who would otherwise be NEET had some limitations in the teaching and nature of the courses.

2.4.3. Critique of the literature on the experiences and support of NEET and "at-risk" of NEET individuals

This section explores the strengths and limitations of the literature on this topic. A strength of the literature was the range of approaches used across the literature to ensure the voices of NEET young people and those "at-risk" of NEET were heard. These approaches ranged from spending time to get to know young people (Buchanan & Tuckerman, 2016), using creative methods as well as interviews (e.g. Hanrahan et al., 2020; Wenham, 2020), using youth advisory groups (Rose et al., 2012), and becoming immersed within a culture using case study and ethnographic approaches (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Phillips, 2010; Simmons et al., 2011). Including the views of young people is important as it allows for implications of what is helpful and unhelpful to be based on their views and experiences. Additionally, it helps paint a more nuanced picture of what it is like to be NEET, offering a more balanced account than is portrayed by looking at risk factors alone.

A similar strength in the research was the commitment to studying the area. An example of this is the ethnographic studies which tended to last between 1 to 3 years, amassing

considerable amounts of data and a rich insight into the experiences of young people, staff, and available support.

A further positive element was that a number of the studies incorporated the views of practitioners and professionals delivering NEET re-engagement interventions and preventative programmes. This approach allowed for an insight to be gained about what professionals view as helpful for NEET young people, and barriers they feel impact their work. It also gave an insight into how professionals may positively and negatively impact the support young people receive.

Additionally, there was a level of consistency in the findings across studies. Despite that many of the studies were small scale qualitative studies offering a highly localised understanding, overall, the studies tended to point towards similar facilitators and barriers in the support. This consistency adds to the robustness of the findings and implications.

There are also some limitations within the research. Firstly, several of the studies lacked clarity in their approach to data analysis, with 10 of the 34 studies offering no description of their method of analysing data and drawing out themes. This omission is problematic as it is difficult to determine how the authors came to their conclusions, making it hard to check for bias or coherence in their findings. This is particularly problematic for ethnographic studies where a huge amount of data is drawn upon, and the conclusions heavily rely on researcher subjectivity.

Secondly, in several of the studies (e.g. Wignall, 2019), the researcher was already involved in the young people's lives which could have led to biased observations within the settings. Thirdly, studying NEET young people is inherently challenging for several reasons. Many of the studies described a significant drop-out rate of participants, which means the findings were often drawn from young people who had more positive experiences and based less on the views of the most vulnerable young people.

Fourthly, the research described in the review was conducted over a period spanning almost 20 years, and, therefore, the applicability and relevance of some of the findings are questionable. This is particularly pertinent for studies conducted into the now dismantled

Connexions Service (Hoggarth & Smith, 2004) and research conducted before the raising of the participation age in 2013. Additionally, all the research was conducted before the current career guidance was implemented. An exception to this is the study by Brown (2021), however this was conducted in Wales where there is different guidance to England. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions relevant to the current support for NEET young people and those at-risk of NEET.

A final limitation in the literature was a lack of research into the views of secondary school staff. There was a lack of studies that focused purely on the views of school staff, in studies where this was included this was often discussed alongside the views of young people. An exception to this is the research by Brown (2021), which included the views of teachers. However, as this research was conducted in Wales, it has less relevance to an English context. Research into the views of school staff is important given the importance of school experiences identified by NEET young people. Furthermore, gathering the views of school staff would provide an understanding of what the current provision is for young people at-risk of NEET and how school staff are experiencing the recent changes in the Government's career strategy.

The limitations and gaps discussed in this section will be drawn upon when introducing my rationale for the current research. In the next section, I explore my second literature question on the role of EPs in reducing NEET.

2.4.4. Q2. What does research suggest the role of EPs is in reducing NEET?

My literature search found five pieces of research conducted within the EP literature around the topic of NEET. I have already incorporated the findings from these studies in the previous section, where they explored the experiences and the support offered to NEET young people and young people "at-risk" of NEET. In this section, I will summarise the suggestions from these studies regarding the potential role of EPs in reducing NEET.

Supporting early identification

The research has suggested that EPs could support with the early identification of "at-risk" of NEET young people (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Currie & Goodall, 2009). Arnold and Baker (2013)

used local authority data to design a screening tool to identify young people "at-risk" of becoming NEET. Through this, they indicated that the majority of young people that became NEET could be identified aged 14 by several risk factors. The authors argued that EPs could have a role in working with local authorities to help identify those "at-risk" of NEET. Specifically, EPs could help local authorities understand the nature of risk in learners and develop models for graduated responses and early intervention based on credible evidence. A strength of this research is that it is based on a real-life example of using a tool to support early identification. However, the idea of using a screening tool to identify young people likely to become NEET raises ethical concerns in terms of labelling and risks ignoring the dynamic nature of the category.

Multiagency working

Several studies pointed to the role of EPs in working with other professionals. Currie and Goodall (2009) suggested that EPs could help improve collaborative working between career services and schools to support more robust NEET identification processes. Gabriel (2015) also suggested that EPs could work with careers services and voluntary organisations like Barnardo's. Both authors also suggested that EPs could make better links between post-16 providers. Turner-Forbes (2017) found that EPs have contradictory views on what multiagency working would look like. One EP advocated for working with external agencies and individual children. In contrast, another suggested the work could be alongside the services to avoid being an unnecessary additional adult in the young person's life.

Bringing psychological skills and knowledge to offer preventative support

Most studies described that EPs could offer the most support preventively before young people became NEET (Turner-Forbes, 2017; Brown, 2021; Gabriel, 2015). The studies suggested that EPs could use psychological skills such as consultation and person-centred approaches to gather views, build an understanding of vulnerable young people, and then offer individual and systemic strategies for early intervention (Brown, 2021; Gabriel, 2015). Several studies also

discussed that EPs could use their psychological understanding to conduct further research (Gabriel, 2015; Arnold & Baker, 2013).

Potential barriers to EP support

A number of potential barriers to EP support were also indicated in the literature. Several studies discussed the difficulties in EPs offering support to young people who already are NEET. By definition, they are not on a school roll and therefore are unlikely to encounter an educational psychology service (EPS) (Gabriel, 2015; Turner-Forbes, 2017). Turner-Forbes also found little agreement across participants on the potential role of EPs in NEET. Some of the professionals in Brown (2021) described barriers in accessing EP support for those at-risk of NEET and questioned whether schools would prioritise the most appropriate young people for EP support.

2.4.5. Summary of Q2: What does research suggest the role of EPs is in reducing NEET?

The literature suggests that there are a number of roles for EPs in reducing NEET; supporting schools and local authorities with the early identification of young people "at-risk" of NEET, multiagency working with careers services, forging robust links with post-16 provision, and bringing psychological skills and knowledge to offer preventative support. However, there were also several potential barriers highlighted in this work, such as limited access to NEET young people, a lack of agreement on an EPs role in NEET, and a lack of capacity.

2.4.6. Critique of the research into the role of EPs in reducing NEET

An overall limitation within the research is the applicability of the findings from the studies. The research by Arnold and Baker (2013) and Currie and Goodall (2009) was conducted 10-13 years ago and much has changed since in terms of educational policy and the nature of EP work. For instance, it is questionable the extent to which EPs would have the capacity to work with local authorities in the way outlined by Arnold & Baker with the current demand for statutory work (Lyonette et al., 2019). Similarly, both the studies by Turner-Forbes (2017) and Gabriel (2015) were conducted shortly after the change in the age range of EP statutory support, so the work

EPs conducted with the 16-25 age group would still have been in its infancy, and the role EPs may have in NEET has changed since this piece of research. Also, the study by Turner-Forbes (2017) was based on a small sample of 3 EPs from 3 different services, so it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the research. Additionally, neither Turner-Forbes nor Gabriel asked professionals how EPs could offer support, so their findings were based on researcher opinions rather than what professionals or schools may have wanted.

In some ways, the research by Brown (2021) offers the most relevant findings as to the potential role of the EP in NEET as it was conducted recently and drew on the views of a range of professionals (teachers, education welfare officers, NEET leads). However, this research was conducted in Wales where schools are not required to have a career leader, so the findings are less applicable to an English context.

2.5. Application of the Literature to Psychological Theory

At the beginning of the literature review, I outlined that one of my aims was to help to build a theoretical basis for understanding NEET. The research summarised in the literature review can be considered using two psychological models that offer a way of understanding the mechanisms that impact young people moving in and out of NEET status. First, I will explore Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner 1995), then Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci and Ryan (2012) explicitly reference the work of Bronfenbrenner when situating their theory within a social context. So, these models can be understood as compatible with one another, each aiding with understanding influencing factors related to NEET.

2.5.1. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

Several of the studies discussed in the review gave reference to the work of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) in relation to NEET (Ryan et al., 2019; Lorinc et al., 2020, Cajic-Seignuer & Hodgson, 2016; Gabriel, 2015; Brown, 2021). Bronfenbrenner proposed that development is impacted by a complex interaction of contextual factors, from the individual and their immediate environment to broader cultural factors.

In initial conceptualisations of his theory, the 'ecological model' (1979, 1986), Bronfenbrenner focused on the impact of a person's *context*, which he divided into five nested spheres: the individual child at the centre, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, which will be explored in more detail below. Bronfenbrenner later expanded his model to the 'bioecological model' (1995) to emphasise the active role played by the developing individual within these contexts. In the new model, he added the chronosystem to account for the influence of time and significant events on development.

Bronfenbrenner's updated model placed greater emphasis on the processes and interactions within these contexts, emphasising the dynamic, fluid, and bi-directional elements of these interactions. O'Toole et al., (2019) suggest this model is better considered as a "networked" (p.21) as opposed to a nested system, with overlapping arrangements of structures impacting on and influenced by direct and indirect social interactions of those within the system. Bronfenbrenner used the term 'proximal process' to refer to the enduring, reciprocal forms of interaction between the child, and the experiences, people, and objects within their environment that impact development. The integrated nature of the various elements, including the impact of time, is shown in Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Figure 1).

In this thesis I will refer to Bronfenbrenner's 1995 version of the theory, to account for the effects of time and individual young person factors, alongside context.
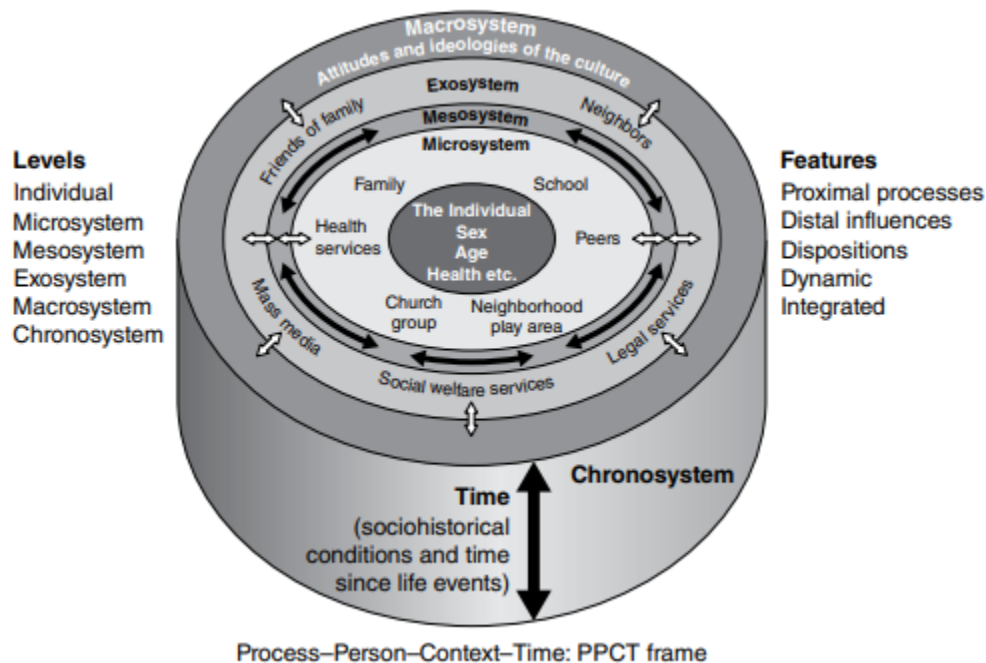
Figure 1. The bioecological model of development, taken from O'Toole et al. (2019).

How does Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model relate to the literature?

The literature discussed highlighted the contextual influences impacting on the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. These are explored below with each of the interacting systems of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model.

1) The microsystem involves the immediate environment, such as the child's family, school, and friends. Bronfenbrenner proposes a bidirectional interaction between individual child factors and aspects of the microsystem. Concerning the literature on NEET, several parts of the microsystem have been indicated as important, such as school experiences and support from friends and family.

2) The mesosystem is how the elements of the microsystem interact with one another. For instance, concerning NEET, this could be how parents interact with the school and how the school and future setting interact. O'Toole et al. (2019) posited that the mesosystem is important in understanding educational transitions. According to Bronfenbrenner,

mesosystems work best when linkages tie the systems together, so there is consistency when people traverse from one microsystem to another. Where there are insufficient linkages, these can act as a barrier or disjuncture (Hayes et al., 2017). This suggestion fits with suggestions in the literature that a lack of support over this transition period impacted NEET.

3) The exosystem contains social structures that influence the microsystem, such as parents' jobs, social services and support agencies. The literature review suggests that factors such as the availability of suitable post-16 provision, career support, and capacity of support services are all important factors that can impact NEET status.

4) The macrosystem refers to the cultural elements such as social-economic status, religion, geographies and ideologies. The macrosystem was indicated to have a role in NEET status, with deprivation, high living costs, and competitive and unstable job markets all thought to impact young people's opportunities.

5) The chronosystem consists of all the environmental changes that influence development over a lifetime. A number of these changes were evident in the literature review, such as school exclusion, school transition, family breakdown, and school moves.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model, therefore, offers a useful lens for understanding the multiple, interacting contextual factors that impact on the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET.

2.5.2. Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory

Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a theory of motivation that proposes three psychological needs are required for optimal personal growth and development conditions:

- Autonomy - the need for one's actions to come from oneself and be congruent with personal values and interests.

- Competence - the need to feel able and confident in one's abilities to achieve the goals set.

- Relatedness - the need to be supported and connected with significant others.

The model proposes that where an individual's needs in these three areas are met, they can engage in goal-directed behaviours and are more likely to have the motivation to move towards their intended outcomes. A fundamental assumption of the theory is that there are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to activities that we actively seek to engage with because they are meaningful to us, for instance, studying a topic because we are inherently interested in it. Extrinsic motivation refers to activities that we seek to engage with because there is a separable reward or punishment for not completing the activity, for instance, studying because of the need to pass an exam. Extrinsic motivation can therefore be experienced as controlled or pressured. Deci and Ryan (2012) suggest that where people feel controlled by extrinsic motivators, their need for autonomy will be impacted, which will likely have some negative motivational, performance, or wellbeing consequences.

The theory has been applied to various areas, including education, work, parenting, sport, psychotherapy, development, and occupational therapy (see Van den Broeck et al., 2016 for a meta-analysis). Of particular relevance to NEET, Guay (2022) reviewed a body of studies that use Self-Determination Theory to understand student motivation in school. The review found evidence for several elements of the model:

- Intrinsic motivation was found to be linked to positive outcomes for students.

- Increased motivation was found when students' psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness were satisfied.

- Support and intervention focused on the three psychological needs led to increased motivation and outcomes.

The model has also been applied to understanding the life experiences of NEET young people in a study by Gabriel (2015). Gabriel suggested that being NEET is a situation where young people's competence, relatedness, and autonomy are "undermined" (p.211). Gabriel also suggested that support in these areas was important for young people when moving out of NEET.

My reading of the literature suggests that Self-Determination Theory is a useful model to help understand how the experiences, risks, barriers, and supportive factors identified in the literature can contribute to young people moving in and out of NEET. Below, the three psychological needs are considered with the literature:

1) *Autonomy*

There were examples of young people's autonomy being undermined in the literature. For instance, the experiences of young people who did not understand the relevance of what they were learning and young people who were prevented from taking their preferred courses indicating their actions were not congruent with their values and interests. Additionally, young people's hopes for the future were found to be influenced by the opportunities around them rather than being able to pursue areas of intrinsic interest.

2) *Relatedness*

In the literature, there were themes around young people feeling isolated from friends and the community and not having their support needs met in school or during transition points. A prominent theme in both prevention and re-engagement strategies was the importance of supportive relationships in enabling change for young people, thus fitting with the importance of relatedness.

3) *Competence*

Young people indicated low confidence in their abilities at school, and some experienced negative labour market opportunities, which impacted on their belief in themselves over time. Research suggested that when young people were supported to feel more competent through formal learning and personal growth opportunities, this positively impacted them.

By applying Self-Determination Theory to the research on the experiences of NEET young people and those at risk of NEET, it is possible to understand why young people may become NEET and why certain aspects of an intervention or prevention strategy are useful. A strength of the model is that it is not a model of motivation that focuses purely on individual factors. It considers the impact of social context on how these three psychological needs are realised. Referencing Bronfenbrenner, Deci and Ryan (2012) describe these psychological needs as embedded within proximal social contexts and broader distal influences. For instance, the extent to which a young person feels competent will depend on many factors, including the support they receive at home and school and the opportunities they receive. Additionally, the way that support is offered will be impacted by wider contextual factors. For instance, Ryan and Weinstein (2009) show how governmental policies concerning high stakes testing influence educational systems and classroom practices, leading to less autonomy for teachers and students. Therefore, Self-Determination Theory can be understood as compatible and complementary to the work of Bronfenbrenner.

2.6. Conclusions of the Literature & Rationale for Current Research

Much of the research in this chapter further highlights the notion discussed in the Introduction Chapter that NEET is a social justice issue. The views of young people and professionals indicate the negative experiences that have led to young people becoming NEET, the impacts of time spent NEET, and sometimes the shortfalls in the preventative and intervention responses.

An important theme in many of the responses from the young people and professionals in the studies was school experiences and support received in school. These findings point to the role of schools in providing preventative and tailored support, which recognises that some young people may require additional guidance to find opportunities post-16.

The literature also indicated that school experiences are not the only factor impacting NEET status. There are also structural barriers regarding the availability of opportunities and

support, and systems that are more easily navigated by some than others. Although schools cannot ameliorate all structural barriers for young people, they can arguably seek to attenuate some structural barriers through tailored and preventative support.

The preventative role that schools can have in reducing NEET has also been recognised in government reports (Public Health England, 2014; Learning & Work Institute, 2019) and arguably fits with the increased profile and accountability of schools in providing career guidance and education outlined in the current policy (DfE, 2021a).

The research focused on preventative support for young people "at-risk" of NEET has focused on the views of young people and external professionals delivering programmes rather than the views of the school staff. Understanding the perspectives of school staff is essential, given the pivotal role they have in providing preventative support for students "at-risk" of NEET. The research at the start of the chapter indicates that the current statutory guidance is well received by those in the role and has some positive impacts in schools. However, these pieces of research do not offer in-depth accounts of those professionals' experiences or specifically relate to their work in preventing NEET. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature exploring how school staff perceive their role in preventing NEET and how this role is experienced. Additionally, the EP's role in preventing NEET has been recognised in the literature (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018), although very little recent research has considered how this may work in practice, especially by directly gathering the views of school staff.

Considering the above and the gaps identified, this research will focus on the views of school staff on the role schools have in reducing the risk of young people becoming NEET, what they perceive as facilitators and barriers in this work, and how other professionals, including EPs, can support them. The research will focus on the views of career leaders because of their responsibility for career education and guidance. The perspectives of SENDCos will also be sought because of their role in working with pupils with increased vulnerability to becoming NEET

and their links with EPs. The Methodology Chapter outlines my reasoning around these two roles in more detail.

The three research questions are as follows:

1) How do career leaders and SENDCos perceive the role schools have in identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET?

2) What do career leaders and SENDCos perceive as challenges and successful strategies in this work?

3) How can professionals work together to prevent NEET, and how might educational psychologists offer further support in this area?

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter outlines my design choices, procedural practices, and analytic approaches in the research. In line with suggestions from Braun and Clarke (2021a), this chapter aims to be both descriptive (what I did) and explanatory (why) so that the reader can understand the decision points of the research and the rationale for my choices. I begin with outlining my philosophical considerations. I then move through the methodological decisions, including considerations on participants, methods, ethics, recruitment, analysis, and quality assurance.

3.1. Philosophical Orientation

3.1.1. Ontology & Epistemology

Ontology and epistemology are both important philosophical orientations that underpin much of the justification for using different methodologies in research (Schwandt, 2015). It is essential that researchers outline their ontological and epistemological standpoints, in order to make clear the assumptions the research is embedded within (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Ontology is the exploration of being and existing and our assumptions about reality and truth (Thomas, 2009). In simpler terms, it refers to *what* we believe we can know (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Epistemology, on the other hand, refers to theories about *how* we know or examine reality (Tennis, 2008). This section explores the fundamental ontological and epistemological stances, then outlines the positions the current research is embedded within.

Ontology

Three fundamental ontological stances are realism, critical realism, and relativism (Braun and Clarke, 2021a), these are sometimes thought as a spectrum with realism and relativism at opposing ends and critical realism sitting somewhere in the middle. Realism conceptualises a knowable reality that exists independently of human knowledge or perception (Peikoff, 1993), which can be uncovered in an accurate and objective way (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Critical realism on the other hand, does not refute the idea that there is a reality that exists independently of human knowledge, but argues that human experiences of reality are influenced and structured

by language and culture. Critical realism, therefore, differs from traditional realism by separating *reality* and *human representation of reality*, believing that what we know about reality will only ever be our representation of that reality. Critical realism can be understood as offering a contextualised version of reality. Relativism offers a perspective that is further away from the assumptions of realism. Relativism does not subscribe to the idea of a singular reality that exists independently of human perception (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Instead, reality differs between individuals based on ideas that are constructed through interactions and experiences.

In my research I orient from a critical realist standpoint. I do not reject the idea of an existing reality; however, I assume that human perceptions of this reality are structured by the influences of language and culture.

Epistemology

Three fundamental epistemological stances are positivism, contextualism, and constructionism. These can also be considered on a spectrum, with a positivist perspective at one end, a constructionist at the other, and contextualist perspective in between the two. Positivism assumes that the external world is quantifiable and objective and can be examined through principles of natural sciences (Bryman, 2016). Research from a positivist standpoint should be conducted in a value-free way (Bryman, 2016), with a researcher aiming to unearth "truth" through the research process. Contextualism, on the other hand argues that it is not possible to study humans separately from the context they are within, with language, culture and ideologies influencing how they perceive the world and how the researcher perceives them (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). A contextualist researcher must be reflexive and make their values and assumptions about the world visible to the reader (Braun and Clarke, 2021a).). Constructionism offers a differing perspective, where evidence is thought of as *produced* within the research, rather than revealed or unearthed (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Constructionists aim to understand meaning through exploring how individuals construct and make sense of the world from an individual perspective (Creswell, 2007). Within constructionist research, language plays an active

role in creating and shaping reality (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Constructionism overlaps with some of ideologies associated with contextualism but goes further by rejecting a notion that there is any foundation for knowledge, and instead seeing human experience as socially constructed.

In this research I take a contextualist epistemological stance. I see my participants views and my understanding of their experiences influenced by the culture and context we are both within. I am not trying to find an objective 'truth' away from these values and influences, nor am I trying to create a new meaning through our interactions.

3.1.2. Research Paradigm

Qualitative and quantitative paradigms are a common distinction in research (Bryman, 2016). The two research strategies can be considered to have distinct aims. Quantitative research aims to confirm an idea, whereas qualitative research seeks to explore (Bryman, 2016). There are various approaches associated with qualitative research, such as interviews, field notes, observations, and photographs. Each method seeks to locate the observer in the world of their subjects using interpretative approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

My research aligns with a qualitative paradigm. I am interested in finding meaning by exploring school staff's experiences and perceptions concerning their work in reducing the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. I am not trying to confirm a hypothesis nor find absolute truth. The research aims to construct an understanding situated in the local context, the context of the schools, and the individual experiences of my participants.

3.2. Consideration of Participants

An initial consideration in this research was which secondary school staff to recruit. I decided that career leaders and SENDCos would be most appropriate. I was interested in speaking to career leaders due to their role in overseeing the delivery of school career programmes, which has clear relevance to NEET as a topic. I was interested in interviewing SENDCos due to their potential strategic role in supporting pupils at greater risk of becoming NEET, such as vulnerable pupils and those with SEND. Their role in supporting the transition to

post-16 settings also highlighted their potential contribution to preventing NEET. Recruiting SENDCos had other advantages. SENDCos are often part of the senior leadership team, so they can provide oversight of whole-school strategies. Additionally, SENDCos frequently work with EPs, so they could offer a perspective of how EPs could support schools working with students at risk of becoming NEET. I considered speaking to headteachers for their oversight of whole-school strategies. However, I felt headteachers would be difficult to recruit due to their multiple responsibilities and busy schedules. I also considered speaking to designated teachers due to their role in supporting children in care. However, I decided that these staff members may have been able to offer limited perspectives on reducing NEET for other pupils. Additionally, I felt that an understanding of support for children in care could be gathered through SENDCos, who also work with this cohort.

3.3. Consideration of alternative methodologies & approaches.

I chose to approach my research using interviews and reflexive thematic analysis, my rationale for this decision is explored in later parts of this chapter. First, I outline my consideration of alternative methodologies and approaches.

I considered whether Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) as a methodological approach would be appropriate. IPA has appeal for many reasons. It is an approach that is rooted in psychological study and employs an in-depth analytic approach. It aims to make sense of how people make sense of a life event. The deep engagement with areas of significance for a person had analytic appeal to me, and I felt it aligned well with my career path as an EP. However, IPA is usually used to explore how people make meaning from a major life experience, where the lived experience has a particular significance for them (Smith et al., 2009). My research aims to draw out themes around the support offered in schools, rather than an in-depth account of my participants' experiences. Therefore, it was decided that this approach would not best align with the research aims.

I also considered whether conducting surveys would be appropriate. Surveys could have led to a broader understanding and could have been sent out to a wider range of participants and audiences, even nationally. However, as surveys do not allow for follow-up questions, it would be hard to probe the participants' perspectives more deeply. Therefore, it would have prioritised breadth of data over depth (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.4. Methods

3.4.1. Interviews

Qualitative interviewing is a popular resource in health and social research that builds on a natural human propensity to understand others' perceptions, perspectives, and experiences through conversation (Brinkmann, 2013). Interviews allow people's perceptions to be uncovered in an accessible way (compared to approaches such as observation) (Brinkmann, 2013). Interviews often seek to cover both factual information and understand the meaning behind what an individual says (Turner, 2010) and therefore suit the exploratory aims of my research. Several philosophies can underpin interviews; for instance, Roulston (2010) discusses that interviews can come from neo-positivist conceptions, suggesting that a "true self" is revealed through the interview process. However, in line with my epistemological position and my ontological stance, I applied principles of contextualism to interviewing. I assumed that the ideas discussed within the interviews do not necessarily represent an unearthed 'truth' but instead reflect the subjective views of my participants seen through my lens as a researcher.

3.4.2. Critique of interviews as an approach

Despite the intuitive appeal of interviewing, it does come with some limitations (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The quality of the data collected from interviews is heavily reliant on the interviewer's skills (Hermanowicz, 2002). Furthermore, what people feel able to reveal in an interview is shaped by many fluctuating and interacting aspects such as social convention, how the questions are asked, what they think the interviewer is hoping for, and how they feel that day (Hammersley & Gomm, 2008). Therefore, it can be difficult for a researcher to ascertain if what a

participant says is what they really believe or feel. A further limitation is that information in interviews is usually restricted by what it is possible to relay in words. It is not always possible to find the words for internal feelings or states, so in some ways, interviews can place a barrier on what is expressed.

Two aspects of my positionality as a researcher felt pertinent when considering these limitations. Firstly, as a novice researcher, with this being my most extensive research project, I needed to pay particular attention to the quality of my interviewing style. I also considered my position as a trainee EP and the potential impact this may have on how comfortable my participants felt sharing their views. I tried to overcome these limitations by immersing myself in the literature on approaches to interviewing and considering the language, style, and structure of my interview. I also conducted a pilot interview to practise my skills, draw attention to any potential limitations, and see how the research was experienced by someone taking part. My learning from the literature and my pilot interview are discussed in the latter parts of this chapter.

3.4.3. Consideration of different types of qualitative interviews

Interviews can vary in terms of structure (structured, semi-structured, and unstructured) form (individual, joint or focus group), and medium (e.g. in person, virtual, or telephone). I chose to use joint semi-structured interviews conducted over video conferencing for the research. My rationale for this relates to practical reasons, data quality, and balancing breadth and depth. These reasons are explored below through critical engagement with different methods and their applicability to my aims.

1) *Structure*

A distinction is often drawn between structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews, although the structure can be best considered as a continuum (Brinkmann, 2013). I decided to use semi-structured interviews, which are the most used in qualitative research (Brinkmann, 2013).

Structured interviewing involves asking identical questions to all interviewees without deviating from a predetermined structure (Turner, 2010). The benefits of using structured interviews are that answers can be compared across participants with greater ease and are quantifiable (Brinkmann, 2013). However, these approaches restrict the interviewer from following interesting and unexpected lines of inquiry and do not allow for knowledge that is constructed through more fluid conversation and rapport. Brinkmann (2013) also argues that such approaches tend to give culturally conventional answers rather than deeper insights.

At the other end of the continuum are unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews tend to involve an initial open question and a few broad areas of exploration (Bryman, 2016). Unstructured interviews allow interviewees to describe their experiences based on their constructions and priorities (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It is thought that when an interview's theme, structure, and process are dictated by the researcher, this can create an inherent power imbalance between the researcher and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Unstructured interviews can give the interviewee greater autonomy and are sometimes used in research with marginalised individuals who do not often have their voices heard (Risvi, 2018). A limitation of unstructured interviews is that the lack of structure can be disconcerting or confusing for interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Additionally, the interviews can produce data that lacks coherence and is difficult to analyse, draw out key themes, or relate to specific research questions.

In semi-structured interviewing, the researcher has a prepared interview guide of questions they aim to ask (Bryman, 2016). There is leeway regarding how the questions are asked, the order, and the freedom to omit questions or follow the interviewee's line of interest (Bryman, 2016). There are some drawbacks of semi-structured interviews; they can be labour intensive and require a high level of interview skill, background knowledge, sensitivity, and engagement (Adams, 2015). However, I felt the potential benefits outweighed this. I felt that semi-structured interviews would be most suitable for my research. The approach would strike a balance between allowing

enough flexibility to understand what is important for the interviewee and having enough structure to answer the research questions.

2) *Form*

Interviews can also vary by form, most commonly individual interviews or focus groups, but joint interviews are also used. I decided to use joint interviews in my research but considered all options. This section will outline the strengths and limitations of the focus groups and individual interviews and why I decided upon joint interviews.

Focus groups usually involve around six to ten participants (Chrzanowska, 2002). The interviewer takes the role of a moderator who focuses the group discussion on themes of interest (Morgan, 2002). Often focus group interviews are more dynamic and closer to everyday conversations than individual interviews (Brinkmann, 2013). Focus groups can be less threatening for some participants and allow researchers to quickly gather a greater breadth of data. However, focus groups can have an unequal amount of participant contribution, miss the views of some, and offer a more general and less in-depth perspective of an issue (Willig, 2013). I felt that focus groups would not be suitable for my research. The approach would have enabled me to reach a broader range of participants (e.g. designated teachers, headteachers) and a greater breadth of data due to the relative speed of data collection. However, a valuable part of my research was the subjective views within each school, especially as NEET rates can vary significantly by geography (Boshoff et al., 2019). If I opted for focus groups, it could dilute perspectives from individual schools offering less depth and the potential for some participants to dominate and skew the data.

Individual interviews involve one participant and one interviewer (Brinkmann, 2013). They can be more time-consuming in data collection than focus groups. However, they have several benefits. They allow the researcher to follow the relevant line of inquiry and allow for more confidentiality which may result in gaining deeper insight, especially for emotional and taboo topics (Brinkmann, 2013). I was interested in using individual interviews due to wanting to hear

in-depth accounts. However, as I was interested in interviewing both career leaders and SENDCos, it would have been time-consuming to speak to them individually or limiting in terms of the range of my data if I opted to only interview one of them. I also felt that my research was not on a particularly sensitive topic, so it was less likely that participants would feel they needed to be alone to discuss their true feelings.

Joint interviews (also called paired interviews, dyadic interviews, and paired depth interviews) involve one researcher interviewing two people simultaneously to explore how the pair perceives a phenomenon or situation (Wilson et al., 2016). The approach usually involves interviewing two people who have an existing relationship, such as friends, relatives, couples, co-workers, or those with a professional-client relationship (Morris, 2001). There are some limitations of the approach. Joint interviews can be more challenging to organise as both participants must be available at the same time. Additionally, power dynamics between the interviewees could limit participant contribution and integrity of the data or even cause conflict for the pair following the interview (Wilson et al., 2016). However, there are also possible advantages. Morgan et al. (2013) discuss that the approach combines the benefits of focus groups, enabling participants to support and prompt each other while reducing some drawbacks, such as a lack of depth and the potential to miss individual views. The approach can also provide more complete data with either member of the pair filling in missing parts of the story or offering differing perspectives (Wilson et al., 2016). Sometimes the approach is also used where the researcher is interested in how the pair interact (Wilson et al., 2016), although this was not a focus of my research.

I felt that joint interviews were the best for my research for several reasons. I hoped it would enable more schools to participate within the project's time constraints, meaning a greater breadth of information should be gathered. Additionally, as SENDCos and career leaders have distinct roles in the school, it was hoped they would be able to offer different perspectives and, therefore, a broader account overall, each adding to the other's views. This approach is similar to EP consultation practice, which focuses on the co-construction of meaning between both parties

(Wagner, 2000). Finally, in line with wanting the research to contribute broadly to better outcomes for young people, it was hoped that conducting joint interviews would allow the participants to jointly reflect on practice and encourage information sharing, which could lead to improvements in their future practice and working relationship. This perspective relates to a proposal by Wilson et al. (2016) that joint interviews can be transformative and lead to new understandings for interviewees. In the research, I was interested in having an impact beyond the research findings, so this idea was particularly compelling for me.

3) *Medium*

Interviews can be conducted in person, over the telephone (Holt, 2010), and more recently, over videoconferencing methods such as Microsoft Teams (Thunberg & Arnell, 2021). At the time of my ethics proposal, no in-person research was permitted due to governmental social distancing restrictions, so in-person interviews were not an option for this research. I opted for video conferencing instead of telephone interviews. I felt the video would allow the conversation to flow more smoothly as the participants and I would be able to anticipate each other talking through reading facial expressions. Indeed, research has indicated that because of the camera, videoconferencing can be just as effective as in-person options (see Thunberg & Arnell, 2021 for a literature review). Additionally, some have argued that the approach can be more flexible and relaxed for participants as they do not need to meet a stranger or travel (Alkhateeb, 2018).

3.4.4. Materials

I developed a pre-interview script and interview topic guide (see Appendix E & F) informed by my reading of the literature (e.g. Adams, 2015), discussions with my supervisor, and a pilot interview. Adams (2015) writes that it is important to start with less threatening, even throw away questions to put your participants at ease. So, I began with rapport building questions and then a broad open question about how the participants came into their roles to understand their individual contexts. Adams (2015) also describes that it is best to start with general questions and become more specific as you move through the interview. Influenced by this and my pilot interview (see

below), I then asked what their concerns were around NEET. This question also gave me an understanding of their local context. Next, I asked specific questions about their approaches and work with other professionals. Drawing on the benefits of unstructured interviews discussed in the previous section, I ended with a very open question "is there anything else you think is important in relation to NEET that we have not yet talked about?". I wanted to value my participants' perspectives and reduce the asymmetric power balance between interviewer and interviewee.

As Adams (2015) advised, I adopted a casual, friendly tone, aiming to sound interested and not surprised or shocked by comments. I registered people's comments with a "yes" and sometimes used prompts to encourage them to elaborate, such as "could you expand on that". I also summarised using the participants' words to indicate active listening and confirm I understood. Leech (2002) described the importance of not appearing to be an expert or contradicting what a respondent said, so I adopted a humble, open-minded, non-directive demeanour. Although I had an interview guide, I allowed the conversation to move naturally and for the order of questions to change if this followed the flow of the conversation.

Additionally, as I was using joint rather than individual interviews, I used specific skills to promote the inclusion of both interviewees. I aimed to have a roughly equal split between the amount each person spoke. I ensured I used eye contact with both and addressed questions to them equally. I used scripts, such as "is there anything you would like to add?" and "does that align with your experiences?" to re-direct the conversation towards the other person in instances of imbalance. I drew on my skills and experience in EP consultation to further support me in this area.

3.4.5. Pilot

Conducting a pilot study can improve the quality of qualitative research. Malmqvist et al. (2019) argue that running a pilot study can support a researcher to be better informed and ready to face challenges that may arise within their principal study. They add it can support the development of the instruments used for data collection and draw the researcher's attention to

potential oversights or weaknesses. Recognising my position as a novice researcher, I felt these points were pertinent for my research.

I interviewed a peer in the position of career leader in a different local authority. There were several limitations in terms of the applicability of the interview to my research. He works in an independent Islamic Girl's school rather than a maintained school. Additionally, I interviewed him alone rather than alongside a SENDCo, which did not mirror my joint interview approach. However, it was helpful in terms of reflecting on my interview questions, style, and techniques.

Through conducting the interview, I had several reflections on the order and wording of the questions:

- The interviewee went off-topic at several points and forgot the questions on two occasions

- The interview lasted 1 hour, which meant I would need to be mindful of time in my substantive study as I would be interviewing two people together.

- The interviewee often talked about his role as a career leader but less specifically about work supporting those who were at-risk of becoming NEET.

- The interviewee talked about the context of the school concerning those that are most at-risk of becoming NEET (in this case, issues relating to the school being an Islamic girl's school). This area seemed to be interesting for understanding the context of the school and any particular barriers. At this point, it was an area I did not specifically address in my topic guide.

- After the interview, the interviewee and I discussed aspects of the interview that could be different. He suggested adding a question about whose responsibility it is to support those at risk of becoming NEET – as he was not sure it was his responsibility and wondered if this sat more with the school safeguarding team.

In line with my reflections and my peer's comments, I updated my interview guide with questions on the local school context concerning NEET and whose responsibility it is to reduce NEET (these are highlighted in yellow in the Appendix F). I also added scripts and reminders to my pre-interview script (Appendix E) to gently prompt participants back to my research questions and welcome participants to ask for a question to be repeated where necessary.

3.4.6. Ethical Approval

The School of Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee (SPS REC) granted ethical approval for the study on the 3rd of July 2021 (see Appendix G for my complete ethics form & Appendix H for the confirmation of approval). My ethics form details my full considerations to ensure the confidentiality, anonymity, safety, and emotional wellbeing of my participants.

Informed consent was sought from all participants prior to the interview. The consent form and information sheet provided to participants detailed the voluntary aspect of the research, and their right to withdraw and to erasure. These documents also detailed the steps that would be taken to ensure participants' anonymity by removing any identifiable details in the transcript. The limitations of confidentiality were outlined.

The research was relatively low risk. However, it was still important that I took steps to ensure the emotional wellbeing of my participants. I explained the research aims in the information sheet so that the participants knew what to expect. I also detailed that space would be provided following the interview if participants needed to discuss any feelings of upset and that participants could stop the interview at any time. When timetabling my interviews, I made sure I was free immediately after the interview in case this was necessary.

In addition to seeking consent, outlining the right to withdraw and erasure, and support for the emotional wellbeing of participants in writing before the interviews, this information was repeated verbally at the start of the interviews before I started to record. This approach meant that I could ensure participants had understood and gave them the opportunity to ask questions.

Additionally, during the recruitment process, multiple opportunities to ask questions were provided via email or telephone (depending on the recruitment method).

Due to using a joint interview approach, special attention was taken to ensure the interview was balanced in terms of potential power dynamics between the two participants. Before the interview began, I described to participants that "the interview would follow two guiding principles of *collaboration* and *respect*, with the aim to jointly reflect on professional experiences and challenges within the wider school/ political environment, rather than to comment on the practice of colleagues". I used my training and experience in conducting joint consultations as a trainee EP to ensure that both participants were included equally.

A further ethical consideration in my research was around the COVID-19 pandemic. As previously described to conform with social distancing restrictions at the time of gaining ethical approval, I conducted my interviews over video conferencing. Additionally, during my recruitment, I was mindful of the stress schools were under with reduced teams, and adapted schedules and teaching practices. I empathised with potential participants and understood where they explained they were unable to take part due to their high workload.

3.4.7. Recruitment & Participants

A purposeful approach was taken for recruitment. All current SENDCos and career leaders working in a maintained or academy secondary school in the local authority (42 schools) were eligible to take part. I approached staff via email and telephone between July 2021 to January 2022. The complete timeline is shown below in Figure 2. My recruitment email, information sheet, confidentiality protocol and consent form are provided in Appendix I. Additional ethical approval was sought to recruit via telephone (see Appendix J) due to difficulties with recruitment.

July, 2021	•Email (and follow up) was sent to headteachers in all secondary schools in the local authority. •2 pairs of interviews secured.
September & October, 2021	•Email (and follow up) was sent to all remaining career leaders in the local authority as their email addresses were usually provided on the school website, where this was not the case emails were sent to the school admin address. •2 pairs of interviews secured.
November, 2021	•I asked EPs to share the research with the SENDCos from their link schools. • 0 pairs of interviews secured.
January, 2021	•I phoned (and followed up) all remaining schools asking to speak to the career leader or SENDCo. Where neither were available, I left a message with the admin staff or followed up via email (on advice from the admin team). • 4 pairs of interviews secured

Figure 2. Recruitment timeline for study.

A total of 8 joint interviews were conducted from 8 secondary schools. Each interview involved both the school career leader and SENDCo. An exception to this was one school, which had two staff members in the role of career leader who both wanted to participate. To not exclude either, it was agreed that both career leaders would participate in the interview alongside the SENDCo (i.e. this interview consisted of myself as the researcher, 2 career leaders and 1 SENDCo). Overall this totalled 17 participants (9 career leaders and 8 SENDCos).

All of the SENDCos had been in the role for four years or more. Two of the SENDCos supported SEND in other schools in their federation. Three SENDCos had teaching positions alongside their SENDCo responsibility. One was also an assistant headteacher. All had other roles within their schools, including designated teacher for children in care, managing access arrangements, designated safeguarding lead, pupil premium lead, and medical officer.

The career leaders had been in their positions between one to three years (coinciding with when the role first became statutory guidance), although many had worked in the school for several years before. Three of the career leaders were part of the senior leadership team, three

had current teaching roles, and three were non-teaching members of staff. One school had two people in the position of career leader (as described above), and two schools had one person in a strategic career role, with another staff member who focused on the delivery aspects of the position. The five remaining schools had one person covering the career leader role.

The schools were spread across the county in rural and urban areas. Five of the schools had a sixth form, two schools were Year 7 to 11 only, and one school was a through school (nursery to Year 11).

Recruitment overall was challenging, which appeared to be related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the additional stress that schools were under. Many potential participants described the challenging situation they were in with greater workloads and a high number of staff members off work due to self-isolation. Three other factors further reduced the potential participant pool; some schools did not have a staff member in one of the roles due to recent staffing changes, some potential participants did not feel they were able to take part if they had only just come into their roles or were providing a temporary maternity cover. Additionally, as some SENDCos and career leaders covered multiple schools this reduced the potential participant pool.

Determining Sample Size

I had initially aimed to interview 10-15 pairs, but this was not possible due to the difficulties in recruiting described above.

The correct sample size for interviews is a widely discussed topic in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Baker et al., 2012). One commonly used criterion is data saturation - the moment in data collection when no novel information is provided from the data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the concept of data saturation is contested within the literature. Braun and Clarke (2021b) describe it as a post-hoc rationale used to justify an endpoint in data collection rather than the reason most researchers cease collection. They argue that it makes little practical or theoretical sense. It would require data collection and analysis to happen simultaneously, rather

than data analysis as a separate stage in the process. Without looking at the data in-depth, it would be impossible to find a point where there is no new data – if such a point even exists. Braun and Clarke (2021b) instead advocate for a pragmatic approach, which includes considering the time constraints of a project, what is deemed appropriate by reviewers and examiners, relevant guidelines for research, and other contextual factors. Importantly, this approach also involves an in-situ decision about whether the data sufficiently answers the question and the data's quality, richness, and complexity.

I used this pragmatic approach to decide when a good stopping point would be in my data collection. I had initially planned that my data collection would be finished by the end of December to give myself enough time to complete my data analysis and write up. However, at this point, I had conducted four interviews and felt this was not yet sufficient breadth to answer my research questions. By the end of January, I had conducted eight interviews (17 participants). I felt that at this point, the data I had collected was sufficiently complex (participants had discussed a range of ideas), rich (I had explored deeply around these ideas), and high quality (with many clear themes emerging even before data analysis that would help answer my research questions). In addition to this, stopping at this point allowed me to have enough time to ensure I completed a high-quality analysis and write up of my data.

3.5. Transcription

An automatic transcription and recording were downloaded immediately after the interviews from Microsoft Teams. The recordings were listened to within two weeks, and the transcription was updated. This process was repeated three times to ensure accuracy.

3.6. Analysis

A key consideration in qualitative research is the approach to analysis. Analysis involves reducing the volume of data into manageable and coherent groups or categories that enable the researcher to extract meaning and make conclusions (Willig, 2013).

I analysed the data using Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Thematic analysis is an approach to qualitative analysis that involves developing, analysing, and interpreting patterns within research data. Braun and Clarke argue reflexivity firmly embeds the approach within a qualitative paradigm. In reflexive analysis, the researcher is an active agent and must reflect on the assumptions, values, and life experiences they bring to the data analysis and research procedure. The approach offers a systematic approach to data analysis that is flexible and can be used with various theoretical approaches.

Thematic analysis was considered suitable for analysing my data set for several reasons. It is compatible with the constructionist position I applied to the research design and interview process. The reflexive element aligned with my assumptions that I was trying to co-construct subjective meaning within the interviews rather than unearth a truth in the data set. The systematic approach would allow me to capture patterns of meaning that would allow me to draw assumptions about the views and perceptions of participants across the data set in a rigorous and transparent way.

The process of Braun & Clarke's (2021a) reflexive thematic analysis involves:

- Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the data.

- Phase 2: Coding.

- Phase 3: Generating themes.

- Phase 4: Reviewing themes.

- Phase 5: Defining and naming themes.

- Phase 6: Writing the report.

(taken from Braun & Clarke 2021a, pp35-36)

3.6.1. Key orientations within the analysis

Braun and Clarke (2021a) write about the importance of outlining the orientations taking within the thematic analysis, in regard to language, whether you take an inductive or deductive approach

to theory in your analysis, and whether you code semantically or latently.   I explore my positions within these orientations below.

Approach to language

Hall (1977) differentiated between three types of language reflective, intentional and constructionist. Reflective language fits with a realist ontology, and assumes language is a true reflection of a reality. Intentional language assumes that language conveys the speaker's unique perspective on reality, this broadly maps onto a critical realist framework.   Constructionist conceptualisations of language believe that language is social and flexible, and that meaning is created within language. In line with my critical realist standpoint, I treated language as intentional in my analysis, I took my participants comments to reflect what their subjective realities were on the topic. This is distinct from a constructionist perspective on language, where I would have focused on the reality that was created through the discussions, and a reflective approach which would have assumed that my participants comments reflected a material reality.

Inductive approach

Researchers vary in the extent to which they take an inductive or deductive approach to theory in the analysis process. Inductive methods are where the analysis is located within the data and driven by the data set itself (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). In contrast, deductive approaches are where the analysis is shaped by a theoretical lens which inform how the codes and themes are read (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). These variations are best considered as a continuum rather than a dichotomy (Bryman, 2016). My approach to analysis was further aligned with an inductive approach, as I sought to draw out themes from the data content.

However, I also recognise that I came to this researcher as a trainee EP so my interpretation of the data will, in some part, have been informed by theoretical knowledge relevant to my training and engagement in the literature on NEET. Additionally, my findings were later considered in terms of two psychological theories – Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995) and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). This consideration was a secondary

stage that I undertook in the discussion part of my thesis alongside broader reflections from the literature, rather than informing the analysis itself. However, there was naturally an element of cross over between these two stages. For instance, during the analysis process, I highlighted some quotes that I felt were relevant to these psychological theories.

Semantic & Latent Coding

A second consideration is the level that meaning is coded within the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Codes can capture meaning at a semantic level, which means they capture what is explicitly expressed by participants. Latent codes, on the other hand, capture meaning on a deeper more implicit level. Semantic codes tend to use language that stays close to what the participants say, whereas latent coding is often more abstracted from the content. I predominantly used semantic level coding. For instance, I used the code "aspirations as a barrier" for the below quote:

Arthur (Career Leader): …*the aspiration does hold some of them back..*

However, as I became more familiar with the coding process, I did move on to use some more latent coding, where I focused more on what could be implied from the participants perceptions. For instance, I used the quote "Schools know what is best for students" for the following quote:

Shell (SENDCo): *really, in certain circumstances, taking control of that transition and saying no, this is where they're going in September. We've done it, it's sorted. For some of our families, not many, but some certainly.*

Moving from semantic to more latent coding was partly influenced by discussions with my supervisor, which is expanded upon in the following section.

The analytic process

Braun and Clarke (2021a) emphasise the importance of reflecting on the analytic process and how the principles were applied. I started the process feeling aware of my inexperience in thematic analysis. To develop my understanding of the process, I immersed myself in the literature. Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide (2021a) and accompanying

videos available on YouTube were essential in helping me to understand what I was trying to do and how. I supplemented these books by reading doctoral theses and Byrne's (2021) worked example of reflexive thematic analysis. These resources were helpful throughout the process and were sources of information that I returned to at multiple points during the analysis.

In the initial familiarisation part, I listened to the interviews and read the transcripts multiple times, making initial notes on my reflections. This part felt quite comfortable to me. During the coding stage, I used the comments section on a Microsoft Word document to write my codes. An example of a coded transcript is provided in Appendix K. As a process this worked for me, as I was able to go back over and easily change codes. However, other aspects of the coding stage were more challenging. I found I was going back and forth over the same small pieces of data, unsure if I was coding 'correctly'. Braun and Clarke warn not to spend too long on this stage as it is only an initial part of the analysis. I decided to involve my supervisor so that I had the confidence to move forwards. Braun and Clarke write that involving the views of another during the analysis does not necessarily align with a better analytic process, as reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the subjective view of the individual researcher and does not see this as a fault in the investigation. However, I felt I needed the input of my supervisor to see if I was on track and had understood this part of the analysis process.

I looked at the codes for one of my interviews with my supervisor, which was a valuable experience. I found that he had quite a different reaction to some of the participants' responses than I had. I realised that I had taken a lot of participants' answers at face value and semantically coded them, using codes that closely fitted what had been explicitly expressed by participants. However, my supervisor's responses were different. He questioned some of participants' responses in terms of what they implicitly implied about the approaches taken by the school or the extent they overcame areas of challenge in their work. Through these discussions, I re-realised my role in the analysis process was not to simply code what the participants said but also to consider what this inferred so that I could draw out implications for practice at later stages of

the research. I then returned to the coding and tried to reconsider myself as a researcher aiming to draw out implications for practice. This led to producing latent codes, in addition to the semantic ones. I tried to draw out implied meaning using latent codes, where this felt more useful for my research aim. I finished with 159 codes across the data set.

While looking for themes, I first arranged my codes in response to the three research questions and then rearranged them into initial areas of similarity. I used a mixture of handwritten mind maps and moving my codes around on word documents. For transparency my theme development is provided in Appendix L. Again, I encountered challenge here, and there was a temptation to move too quickly into answering my research questions and sorting the codes into "strategies" and "challenges". Braun and Clarke warn against doing this as it can produce a weaker analysis, where ideas are grouped together based on shared themes such as 'representing a challenge' rather than highlighting a unified concept within the data. I reminded myself that the themes *overall* would answer my research questions rather than each one neatly fitting into a research question.

I also reflected on some of my emotional responses to the dataset. There were aspects of the interview responses that felt uncomfortable to me. For instance, the participants universally described the role of low aspirations and the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. Through my engagement with the NEET literature, I was aware of the limitations of viewing aspirations as the cause of young people becoming NEET, as it draws attention away from structural factors. My initial reaction was to hide this finding by using language that moved away from aspirations. However, I realised that this would not truly represent the data set nor the universality of this concept between participants. I realised that it was important that 'raising aspirations' was identified as a theme in the data set, and that I could discuss the limitations of this view in the Discussion Chapter.

Again, responding to my feelings of inexperience in this part of the research process, I also chose to reflect on my themes with my supervisor. My supervisor offered some suggestions

around the wording and naming of my themes, but overall, the themes represented my subjective interpretation and were conceptually unchanged from this discussion.

3.7. Quality Assurance

It is important to assess the quality of a research study. This process is regularly done in quantitative research, using standards of quality such as representative sampling, reliability, replicability, and validity (Yardley, 2000). However, the measures used for quantitative research are inappropriate for qualitative methodologies which value the subjective and interpretative aims of the research. Yardley added that it can be difficult to measure the quality of qualitative studies due to the diversity of approaches used within a qualitative paradigm. She proposed four flexible measures that can be used as an evaluative guide. Below, I outline how I aimed to meet these measures in my research.

1) *Sensitivity to Context*

Yardley argued that qualitative research should indicate a sensitivity to the study's context, for instance by considering the social, cultural, and political climate, the participants' context, and views, ethical challenges, as well as reflecting on their own personal position as a researcher (Yardley, 2000).

I aimed to do this with my research in several ways. Before commencing my study, I immersed myself in the literature relating to NEET and relevant policy to ensure I understood terminology and relevant governmental guidance. Secondly, as described in the materials section, I also asked about my participants' roles, how they came into their job and the broader context of the school and the local community. These questions gave me an understanding of my participants' unique context. Thirdly, I was aware of the stress that school staff were under due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When I spoke to potential participants about the research, I stressed that I understood how busy they likely were and that they should only take part if they wanted to. I remained flexible in terms of booking interviews to meet their needs as much as possible.

Fourthly, as well as reflecting on potential power dynamics between my participants (as described in the ethics section), I also reflected on my positionality. I was aware that the participants might feel I was there to judge their practice. I tried to overcome this by remaining interested, friendly, and reassuring. Finally, throughout the research, I kept a reflective journal and wrote reflections after each interview, reflecting on what went well and what could be improved in subsequent interviews. My reflections focused on timing, the phrasing of questions, tact, warmth, listening skills, and how I thought the participants felt, intending to improve areas where necessary. An excerpt of this journal is provided in Appendix M.

2) *Commitment and Rigour*

Yardley (2000) outlines the need for 'commitment', the extent that the researcher engages deeply with the topic and methods. She added that researchers must demonstrate 'rigour' in the thoroughness of their data collection and analysis.

I demonstrated both commitment and rigour in my research. I immersed myself in the literature on qualitative research, interviews, and thematic analysis (e.g. Bryman, 2016; Brinkmann, 2013; Adams, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2021a) to gain an understanding of relevant assumptions and think deeply about my approach to interviewing and analysing my data. I was also aware of my limitations in the research and drew on advice from my supervisor through frequent reflective conversations. I trialled my interview questions through a pilot to see how they were experienced by someone else.

3) *Coherence and Transparency*

Yardley (2000) proposed there must be 'coherence' between the research questions, approaches taken and analysis. She also advocates for 'transparency', suggesting that a reader should be able to understand how the researcher's interpretations were formed and decisions were made through a clearly presented methods and results chapter (Yardley, 2000).

The introduction section and systematic literature review provided a clear justification for the timeliness and importance of the research topic, and relevance to the EP profession. A focus

on depth of understanding, which sought to explore participants' views relevant to their school context, was evident in the qualitative approach. These aims were coherent with the epistemological and ontological perspectives incorporated into the procedure and methodology. Reflexive thematic analysis was carried out using Braun and Clarke's six steps to find themes across participants' perspectives in order to find patterns of meaning that would be useful to practice. I have been transparent with my coding and theme development, with examples provided in Appendix J & K. Additionally, I have been transparent about my decisions in the research process throughout this chapter.

Impact and Importance

Yardley (2000) also emphasised the overall impact and importance of the research. My research aimed to explore a gap in the literature around the views that SENDCos and career leaders have in supporting those at risk of NEET. The research was both timely due to the recent changes in governmental policy for careers in schools and important due to the negative outcomes associated with spending a period NEET. Relevant implications were drawn for practice within schools and for EPs. Further exploration of the impact and importance of the research is provided in the *Contribution to Knowledge* section in the Discussion Chapter.

Through careful consideration of my methods and interviewing technique, I feel that an additional positive impact of the research was aspects that were experienced directly by participants, such as having the opportunity to reflect and feel heard and validated. Feelings of catharsis, such as this, are commonly found in qualitative research (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006; Gair, 2002). The potential benefits for the participants are expanded on in the *Strengths* section of the Conclusion Chapter

Chapter 4. Presentation of Findings

This section aims to present and illustrate themes identified during the thematic analysis process. I identified five themes and several subthemes within my dataset; these are presented in Figure 3. I explore each of the themes and associated subthemes using illustrative quotes from the participants. To protect the participants' identify pseudonyms are used throughout.
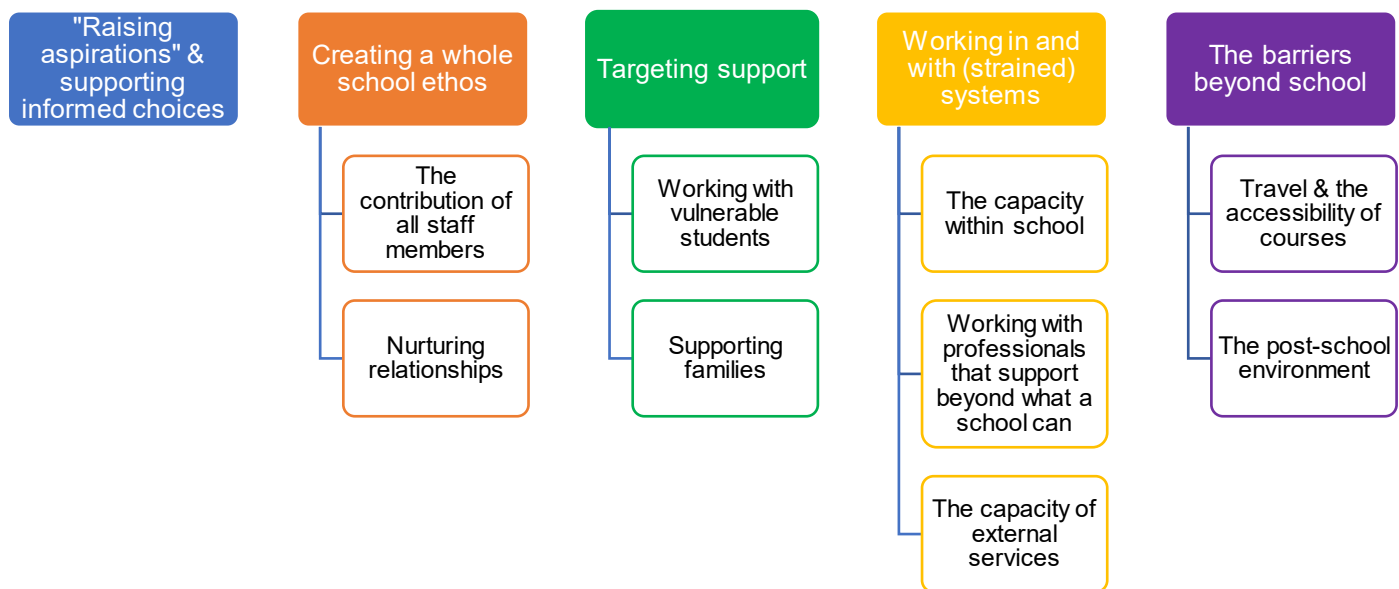
Figure 3. Themes and subthemes identified.

4.1. Theme 1: "Raising aspirations" & supporting informed choices

The theme *"Raising aspirations" and supporting informed choices* relates to the influence that participants felt aspirations have on students' future education, employment, and training. The influence of student aspirations and the role that schools have in both raising these aspirations and supporting students to make informed choices was a common theme in all the interviews. It tended to be the first area that participants talked about, and the strategies they described at greatest length in terms of preventing young people becoming NEET. There were no subthemes for this theme.

Low aspirations were seen as a barrier for students when moving into education, employment, and training. Aspirations were seen by school staff as influenced by the aspirations of their family and their local context. Many of the schools were based in rural areas and areas of deprivation; it was apparent that participants felt that young people's aspirations were influenced by the jobs and opportunities available in their local area and at home:

Arthur (career leader): *…there's a lack of aspiration locally, so children in the area don't aspire very well to jobs (…) 40% are from the valley, so from farming communities from rural places, (…) so, you can often find very able children or children with lots of potential, who, you know, who's only sole focus is that "I'm going to go and work doing what my dad does".*

June (SENDCo): *Uh, and we've got a range of family, some who've got absolute endemic unemployment, sort of generational unemployment, we're very affected by seasonal work in terms of work that is available for some families in (name of area), and I think for the kids, helping them see life beyond (name of area).*

In line with the perception amongst participants that a key barrier for students was low aspirations, a prevalent response to supporting students into education, employment, and training was around career guidance and education that widened their horizons, gave them opportunities to experience different types of work, and increased their awareness of the range of courses on offer. One of the schools explicitly used the term "aspiration week" to describe the annual focus on these activities. Participants tended to emphasise the experiential element of this work, which involved visiting places or physically getting post-16 providers onto the school site:

Heather (SENDCo): *… I think there's a lot of room in terms of taking them up to (name of area) for the day and just seeing and experiencing the culture. And you will see, not for every child, but it will ignite a spark in some children that actually there's something outside of (name of area).*

Joselyn (career leader): *I think that's why we have such low NEETs, is we get the colleges in, we take them to (name of provision), to (name of provision), to (name of provision), the apprenticeship show.*

Similarly, concurrent with the belief that students' aspirations were influenced by the aspirations of parents, several of the participants discussed working with parents to raise aspirations:

Keira (career leader):….*it's not just working with the students, it's working with the families because we've got this generational thing that's kind of become endemic within the culture. (…) it's kind of breaking this cycle of again aspiration I think, or lack of them, and in what the students are hearing at home. So, a lot of the work that we do in our respective ways is to work with the families and their parents.*

There was also a common theme amongst participants of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the capacity for schools to offer these experiential opportunities. Participants discussed not being able to offer work experience opportunities or coordinate in-person links with post-16 providers, for instance:

Susan (career leader): *They completely missed out our current Year 11s because they weren't able to do it, which is a real shame… a lot of them have been saying that to me as well, "I don't know if I want to do that. I didn't get to do work experience".*

Evident in many of the responses was the notion that some students transitioned to opportunities that the schools felt were below what the students could achieve. Within these comments, there tended to be an inference that academic opportunities were perceived as better than technical qualifications:

Arthur (career leader): *there are a number of children each year where they will go off and do level one or level 2 multi trades something like that where actually if they had pulled their finger out, had more aspiration, had that stuff around them, family guidance and all that kind of stuff that comes alongside, and school, you know, I'm not taking us out of that, then actually they should be looking at A levels. They should be looking at apprenticeships. They should be looking at XY and Z and they haven't.*

A striking aspect of the above quote from Arthur is that while he lists a multitude of reasons that influence young people's choices for post-16, including the support they are receiving, the language he uses "if they had pulled their finger out" gives an impression of the responsibility ultimately lying with the young person. A similar level of blame was also directed towards parents in some of the interviews, for instance in the quote below the career leader refers to the parent's "work ethic":

Susan (career leader): *So, their kind of parent's influence, you know, their kind of work ethic and their roles and that kind of thing. So, you know, a lot of them they're aspirations aren't there as they haven't got it from their parents.*

Finally, similarly to some school staff perceiving certain post-16 options as better than others, one SENDCo described using quite a directive approach for some of the students' post-16 transition:

Shell (SENDCo): *really, in certain circumstances, taking control of that transition and saying no, this is where they're going in September. We've done it, it's sorted. For some of our families, not many, but some certainly.*

Summary of Theme 1: "Raising aspirations" & supporting informed choices

The theme *"Raising aspirations" & supporting informed choices* highlights that schools feel they have a responsibility to support students to think about the next steps after school. Participants' comments suggested that they feel low aspirations, influenced by young people's parents and the local context, are a key barrier for students when transitioning to post-16 settings. Their comments suggest that it is an area that they feel schools have a responsibility and capacity to change. There was an element of 'schools know best' in terms of some of the ways the participants discussed what they felt students should be studying post-16.

4.2. Theme 2: Creating a whole school ethos

The theme *Creating a whole school ethos* refers to participants' views that to successfully reduce the likelihood of students becoming NEET, the school needed to embed this within their culture. Several participants referenced the Governmental career strategy and the Gatsby Benchmarks as being influential in raising the profile of careers in school. This theme has two subthemes. Firstly, *The contribution of all staff members*, from the leadership team to those working directly with students. The second subtheme was around *Nurturing relationships.* This theme and associated subthemes are presented in Figure 4.
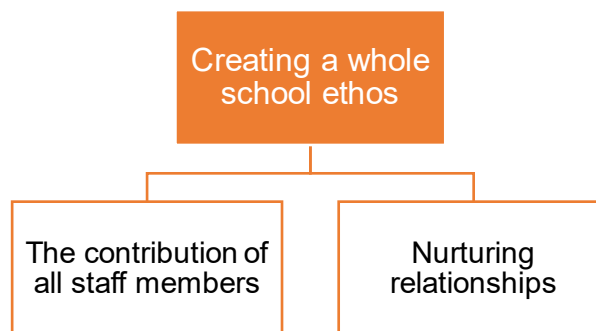
Figure 4. "Creating a whole school ethos" theme & subthemes

4.2.1. Subtheme 2a: The contribution of all staff members

A prominent feeling amongst participants was that supporting students into education, employment, and training was successful in their setting because it was embedded in a school ethos where all staff members had a role. Participants described this ethos was influenced by a leadership team that chose to prioritise careers while being maintained by a team of staff whom each had a collective responsibility:

Shell (SENDCo): *I think we started talking about it more when (name) the headteacher, took over here. I think then careers became more central to the whole vision and values and ethos of this school….Yeah, so at that point, those conversations started happening more frequently and careers was less of a thing that people in the office did, and everyone had a careers appointment and that's fine, and it became more central to what we're doing as teachers and as a community"*

Naomi (career leader): *We have been really fortunate to have some strong leads with good visions about what they want careers to be in the school. So, they've supported*

the development of the [career leader] role and that's why we're successful, with

support of other teams in securing our low NEET rate.

Participants discussed a range of school staff who contributed to preventing young people from becoming NEET. As well as the senior leadership, this included the SENDCo, the career leader, teaching staff, pastoral staff, designated teachers for children in care, heads of year, and key workers. One school had a member of the senior leadership team who was titled "NEET lead". It was apparent that participants felt that support was most effective when staff worked and communicated together while also having distinct roles and responsibilities. For instance, staff in pastoral roles were valued for their understanding of individual students and SENDCos were valued for their ability to support with SEND needs that could relate to NEET:

Jill (career leader): *We've obviously got behaviour support teams and heads of years, all of whom help with that, making sure that children get the best support and don't become NEET, and also from my point of view, they sometimes know the children and families better.*

Jill (career leader): *…like if I understood it was a SEND need, we've got systems in place or if I felt they had, you know, hadn't been recognised. I'd go to Laura (SENDCo) and then Laura would put that in place. I think if we're not careful too many people are talking to too many people.*

Career leaders were often seen as having overall responsibility for reducing NEET rates and finding opportunities. Participants from schools that had a career leader whose sole responsibility was careers felt this was a crucial element of a successful programme:

Arthur (career leader): *ultimately, it's my bag and it's the thing that sits on my job list and therefore I take responsibility for that.*

Joselyn (career leader): *Because it's all well and good telling a teacher who's too busy to do anything and obviously Lucy (career leader) is a non-teaching member of staff so 100% of her time is dedicated to finding the apprenticeships, sharing, getting the information out, which you do brilliantly.*

Many of the participants described that within a school culture that valued and focused on careers, much of the communication around concerns happened on an ad hoc basis:

Jill (career leader): *I tend to run to her [the SENDCos] office and knock on the door…. But it's not on a formal basis. It's as you need it.*

Arthur (career leader): *…it will come through, discussions, often ad hoc discussions between senior leaders, staff, and the children that we're working with.*

4.2.2. Subtheme 2b: Nurturing relationships

Participants described that a vital element of the whole school ethos, was building relationships and creating a nurturing environment for students:

Carrie (SENDCo): *…they know that this is their kind of safe place almost, and you know, we do care about them individually.*

Participants described that by developing staff and student relationships, students felt able to go to staff where there was an issue, and staff knew students well enough to notice and share potential concerns relating to future opportunities:

Naomi (career leader): *I think mostly we've got open door policies where students can just come and see us if they need to.*

Lisa (SENDCo): *In a sense. I think knowing the child, and what they like. Having those informal chats or members of our team kind of saying, "oh, I was talking to so and so and she really wants to do hair but apparently her mums trying to get her to do health and social care". You get all these little bits.*

Summary of Theme 2: Creating a whole school ethos

The theme *Creating a whole school ethos* represents a strength in how schools can support young people and reduce the likelihood of them becoming NEET. As indicated by the above quotes, these schools were able to create a web of support amongst school staff, where everyone contributed towards providing an environment that focused on students' careers and noticed and shared any concerns. Within this, participants placed a particular value on building relationships with young people to understand what they want from their futures and offer necessary support to help them achieve this.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Targeting support

The theme *Targeting support* relates to the support participants suggested their schools offered to vulnerable students and families. It has two subthemes; *Working with vulnerable students* and *Supporting families,* which are explored below. This theme and associated subthemes are presented in Figure 5.
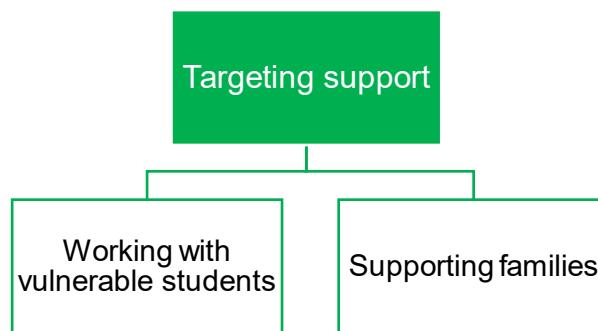
Figure 5. "Targeting support" theme & subthemes.

4.2.4. Subtheme 3a: Working with vulnerable students

Participants described using targeted systems for students who were considered more at risk of NEET based on characteristics such as SEND, pupil premium, or children in care. Participants discussed that these students were given additional consideration around careers and offered enrichment opportunities. Most described that they were provided early career interviews to help prepare them for their futures and consider their options. An example of one career leader's approach is given below.

Naomi (career leader): *our students who are vulnerable, whether it be children in care or SEND students, they have an opportunity for early interviews at the end of Year 10, just to support them in thinking about what options there are and just being ahead of the trend.*

A number of participants described formal processes such as the annual review for students with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) and the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings for children in care as protective and offering an additional layer of support for

these students. A striking finding was that three participants described children in care as less of a concern because of the support already around them. This perception is surprising given that NEET trends generally place this group at the highest risk. An example of one SENDCos view is given below.

Lisa (SENDCo): *I mean, generally I would say that children in care are the least worrisome because they've got so many people around them making sure that their next steps are sorted. They actually themselves do very little. They are generally completely scooped up by social care and the systems around that, and the foster carer, obviously.*

Participants from most schools also described feeling that since the COVID-19 pandemic, they increasingly needed to target students with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs, autism, and, particularly, emotionally-based school avoidance.

Carrie (SENDCo): *I think there's far more with SEMH and definitely more on the autism pathway that are now becoming that kind of key group for me.*

Amy (SENDCo): *Suddenly now I've got this huge heap of students who have become school avoiders (…) They were so comfortable at home they don't see any point in coming to school or all their insecurities and anxieties have just been compounded because they haven't faced them because they've been at home and protected and swaddled.*

Participants appeared mixed in terms of the extent they felt they could offer targeted support for these groups. Some discussed difficulties with not being able to engage with students not in school, for instance:

Susan (career leader): *we had quite a few non-attenders and the school was sort of saying to me, "we need to make sure somethings in place". I'm like, "yeah but they don't respond to me pinging them emails and they're not in school"*

Whereas others described going to students' houses or offering adaptations for those who found attending difficult. For instance:

June (SENDCo): *Nat (career leader) goes around and knocks on the door.*

Terri (SENDCo): *We've got you know, children that really, really have struggled and don't come to school and we're using a robot, a V1, for them to be able to access their learning and their lessons from home.*

4.2.5. Subtheme 3b: Supporting families

Participants also noted the importance of supporting families. Participants described a range of reasons that parents may need additional support, including children with SEND, those who have SEND themselves, families with English as an additional language, and parents who may find it more difficult than others to navigate the system and the next steps.

Shell (SENDCo): *(…) my job as SENCO is to make sure that families with children with SEND are aware of everything that's out there and I spend a lot of time talking with*

families about, well, what's coming next and particularly for those families who might

be disadvantaged in lots of other ways.

Keira (career leader): *So, the information is communicated between us. But it's then*

following up with those higher profile families as well. Whether it's through the SEND

team or because of language barriers as well.

Some participants used less empathetic language when talking about parents and focused on what the parents were not doing rather than the support they may need:

Lisa (SENDCo): *Generally speaking, it's parental apathy and lack of agency and*

pushing their child to get their plan in place.

Summary of Theme 3: Targeting support

Alongside the whole school approaches discussed in Theme 2, all schools described some form of targeted approach recognising that some students were more at risk of NEET than others, particularly those with SEND, pupil premium, and increasingly those experiencing emotionally-based school avoidance. Some schools perceived children in care as at greater risk, whereas others felt these students were more protected because of the support around them. As discussed above, this is a surprising finding, given that NEET trends generally place this group at the highest risk.

Participants expressed differences in how they felt able to offer bespoke support for vulnerable students, such as visiting at home and offering adaptations. This may have been related to the extent to which schools prioritised these needs, or the agency individual staff members felt they had to create change within the school.

Participants from most schools recognised that certain families might need additional support to navigate the system and secure post-16 opportunities for their children. However, participants varied in the extent they empathised with parents. Some recognised these needs were related to a form of disadvantage or vulnerability, and others used language that was more suggestive of blame.

4.3. Theme 4: Working in and with (strained) systems

The theme *Working in and with (strained) systems* relates to the comments participants gave around the capacity of schools to meet the demands placed on them within their resources. When participants discussed working with external professionals, it was clear that this support was valued when it went beyond what the school could offer. However, many of the comments around working with external services recognised the strained capacity and the impacts this had on the support the schools received. This theme is presented using three subthemes*: The capacity within school, Working with professionals that support beyond what a school can*, and *The capacity of external services.* This theme and associated subthemes are presented in Figure 6.
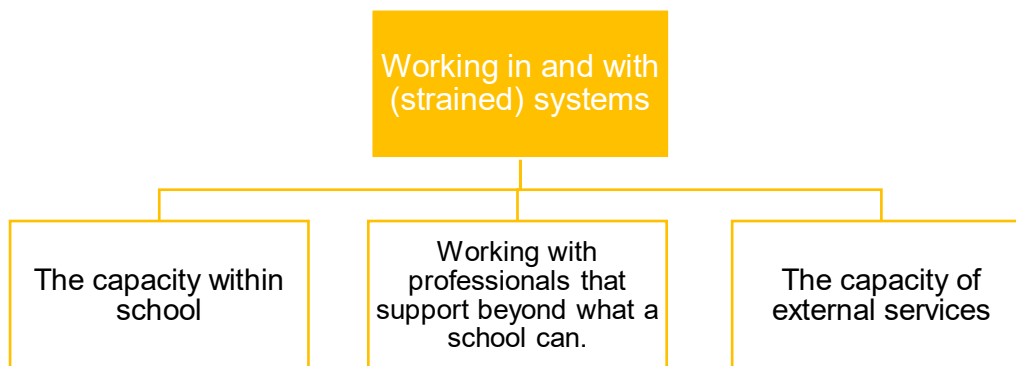
Figure 6. "Working in and with strained systems" theme and subtheme.

4.3.1. Subtheme 4a: Capacity within school

Participants described that it is difficult to meet the myriad demands placed on schools within their resources, as indicated by the quote below. Many schools also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated these pressures.

Arthur (career leader): *...There is an expectation on schools to deliver everything, (…) the number of times you sit and listen to the news in the morning, and you'll hear, you know, "we need to do more of this in schools" and you think, every time they're doing more of this in school, what're you going to take away?*

Participants spoke of reduced funding in schools and an increase in the number of students with SEND:

Shell (SENDCo): *…at the moment we're seeing a massive increase in the number of students who require additional support and intervention and that is putting a massive strain on the system, which is already massively underfunded and under-resourced.*

Some participants described that funding shortfalls meant it was no longer possible to offer previous bespoke interventions that supported vulnerable students with their future opportunities, for instance:

Naomi (career leader): *We used to offer some fantastic programmes when I first started here (…) we used to send the students that Carrie (SENDCo) has just described out to local colleges and on work experience and had a fantastic program in place (…) But then when all that funding was taken away that group of students then had nothing.*

Alongside funding shortfalls and an increase in students with SEND, schools described that due to a governmental focus on academic attainment, they were further limited in the curriculum they were able to offer for students, as indicated below. An interesting aspect of the below quote is the notion that schools need to be 'incentivised' to put in place what is needed for young people.

> Carrie (SENDCo): *…alongside the finance, there's also that kind of element of what government are telling us we have to do, and so, we're quite limited in what we're actually able to offer now as a school (…) And that you know from a SEND point of view is really frustrating, because you get monitored and measured by progress or attainment (…) So the practicalities of a school doing something that's really positive, there's actually no incentive for the school to do it at anymore, which is a real frustration.*

Some participants described that a curriculum focused on academic subjects had an impact on the wellbeing and enjoyment of school for students who found academic subject challenging, as indicated by the quote below.

> Amy (SENDCo): *… the curriculum's become far too academic and everybody in SEND and even out of SEND agrees with that…(…) I used to teach Asdan and it was such a nice atmosphere and it just gave them so much purpose. (…) We have so many unhappy kids nowadays. One of our students who was here with us last year, when she was in trouble, she used to chew her fingers until they bled. I mean, it was absolutely horrendous. Schools was just hideous for her. Why did we have to put her through those four years of hell?*

However, there was variation in how schools felt they could overcome barriers relating to funding and a governmental focus on attainment. One SENDCo listed an extended range of vocational and bespoke courses offered at her school. Providing such opportunities appeared to be possible for this SENDCo because of the impact she was able to have on how funding was spent in the school:

> Terri (SENDCo): *Funding shouldn't be a barrier (…) we go, "OK. Well, how do we rob Peter to pay Paul? (…) it's that fine balance all the time. And I'm lucky I sit on SLT. (…) sometimes they're saying it's being overspent, and I go "no, no, no, no, no. Let's just wait up here".*

4.3.2. Subtheme 4b: Working with professionals that support beyond what a school can.

Participants discussed working with a range of external professionals that contributed to supporting students into post-16 opportunities. These included the local careers service, advice and guidance professionals, post-16 providers, and local businesses. A notable aspect of the participants' responses was that they viewed external involvement as beneficial when it added to what they were able to offer in school. Within this section, I will first explore the participants' views concerning the local careers service, as this was the service that participants discussed the most. Then, I will explore comments around the EP as this is a particular area of interest for my research.

The local careers service

Schools in the local authority are all appointed a professional from the local careers service, a local authority contracted organisation that supports careers and those at risk of becoming NEET. Participants spoke highly of the support they received from this company, particularly when it went beyond what they could provide within school. This included that professionals had a broad understanding of local post-16 courses, particularly for those that needed an alternative or

bespoke option, the flexibility to visit students at home (which was helpful for students not currently attending), continuation of work over the holidays, and mentoring support for those at risk of NEET. For instance:

> Jill (career leader): *… they can do things that we can't, like that they run all the way through the summer holidays, so they can obviously put in that support, and they've also got strategies and enablers who can support them should they need it… they can obviously put in that support which we maybe don't have the time to necessarily do. But we're referring them to the right organisation that can do that."*

One SENDCo also valued the way that the local career service professional worked with parents, feeling that this helped to move the situation forward:

> Lisa (SENDCo): *she would eyeball the parents and she would be kind of, saying, "you know, we need to do this. I'm gonna do this, so you're gonna do that", and she would kind of get these parents organised.*

Educational psychologists

When I asked about support from EPs, there was a general feeling amongst participants that EP work contributed towards reducing NEET, usually in an indirect way. For instance, as part of the EHCP process or school avoidance and school exclusion issues, rather than being the primary reason for referral. Participants described EP involvement as supportive when EPs used their psychological understanding and skills in assessment to highlight potential barriers contributing to a young person being at risk of NEET. A prominent aspect of this was the use cognitive assessments that schools do not have access to. EP understanding of anxiety, relational approaches, and other mental health needs was also valued by some. Examples are given below.

Shell (SENDCo): *…[EPs] effectively identify barriers to learning with a higher level of expertise than I could do, or the programs I'm allowed to use can do (…) Identifying that earlier on, we are in a far better position to be able to prevent NEET because will have the right support mechanisms in place early, we'll be able to identify barriers to learning and overcome them.*

Heather (SENDCo): *I feel that they [EPs] come from a different angle. We often talk about, although we're all trained in attachment-based mentoring, it's bringing that back into the forefront. You know, that how (name of EP) sees things from very different sides to us because he's able to.*

Some participants also described feeling that EPs were able to use their skills in gathering the views of young people, particularly in situations where the school or the local careers service were having limited success, as illustrated by the quote below. However, one school felt that the school and local careers service was already able to gather views of young people, and this was not something that EPs offered additional support with.

Jill (career leader): *Because (the local careers service) can help with the queries, but actually digging down deep to find out what's the deep-rooted issues. Sometimes, 'cause sometimes we just hit a surface, particularly if a child doesn't want to tell you.*

Several participants discussed that EP involvement adds weight or professional authority to help situations move forwards. For instance:

Terri (SENDCo):…*the EP is just a reinforcement because very often as much as we do all the paperwork as much as we do everything schools aren't seen as professionals…So, by having somebody with an EP initial they kind of take a little bit more note.*

In line with the idea that EP support is beneficial when it goes beyond what a school is able to do, EP support was viewed as unhelpful when it did not do this. For instance:

June (SENDCo): *When we've tried having sessions with EPs in the past (…) if I'm honest they have not told us things that we didn't know before (…) I think we're quite hot on it [supporting students with SEND], so a lot of stuff that people say… "Have you tried this?" We think yes, we have. We really have! Yes, we are doing that in lessons. (…) honestly, with people coming and saying, you know, do a five-point scale or social stories or pre-teaching, or make sure your using visuals or…. I just think yeah…*

This SENDCo again stressed that the cognitive assessment is the most useful part of EP involvement as this is the bit schools cannot do:

June (SENDCo): *It's more useful to have sort of a snapshot of assessment so that we can understand sort of the profile of the child that maybe we haven't really got in school.*

4.3.3. Subtheme 4c: The capacity of external services

When discussing support from the local careers service and the EPS, the lack of capacity of these services was present in most of the interviews.

In terms of the local careers service, the lack of capacity described by participants tended to be focused on two areas. The first area was a recent change in the support the service offered.

Previously the school's link professional from the service would attend annual reviews for students with EHCPs. However, participants described that these professionals were no longer commissioned to participate in these meetings. They relayed that this led to a doubling up of the amount of admin and communication required and meant that parents could not meet these professionals. For instance:

> Heather (SENDCo): *Can I just point out that (local careers service) now, they're not commissioned to come to education health care plan reviews. So, they used to come to Year 10 and Year 11 annual reviews and that has stopped, so that service has stopped. So, that was absolutely vital to the children to have that careers person there. And it's been decommissioned, and we just found out at the beginning of this year. So, you know, it's putting even more pressure on people like Lucy (career leader) to liaise then.*

> Lisa (SENDCo): *…parents with low capacity, they need to meet these people. So, for me, not having (local careers service) at those meetings because they are not allowed. It's really a real loss and really impacts on the NEETs.*

The second gap that SENDCos and career leaders identified in the support they received from the local careers service was the referral criteria for support for those at risk of NEET. They described that the support was only available to students that met specific criteria, such as having an EHCP. The participants relayed that there were students they felt would have benefitted from this support but were not eligible because they did not meet the criteria. Particularly, participants discussed worrying about "SEND K students" (students who accessed SEND support in school but did not have an EHCP) whom they felt were at risk of NEET. One SENDCo described that this was one of the first barriers she would change:

Terri (SENDCo): *I think mine would be straight away that they should never have reduced the funding for (local careers service) (…) I think it should be open for those children that are on the SEN list. Because a lot of our children, even those with special exam arrangements, you know are and could be at risk of NEET.*

The limited capacity of the EPS was present in all the interviews. In the local authority that the research was situated, the EPS has limited the amount of EP hours schools can buy for case work due to the high demand for statutory assessments. Several SENDCos described that a lack of availability of EP hours meant that some students were unlikely to receive the EP involvement they required, as indicated by the quote below.

Heather (SENDCo): *…we've got an amazing EP, (name). Can't praise him highly enough. The difficulty is he just doesn't have time and so I'm looking, I've got a board here with a list of how many kids I need to see the EP. He's gonna see just three of them this year, 'cause even though we buy in hours, we've been told that we can't buy that many hours because there is not capacity.*

The quotes suggest that the range of work and involvement schools have from the EPS is impacted by the capacity of the service. One SENDCo said they only worked with EPs for statutory assessments. Another SENDCo had chosen to use a private EP due to the limited capacity of the local authority EPS.

Summary of Theme 4: Working in and with (strained) systems

The limited capacity of schools and external services was present in all the interviews. Participants spoke of reduced funding in schools, an increase in the number of students with SEND, and the pressure the government placed on schools to reach specific attainment

requirements. For some, there was a feeling that the combination of these pressures meant it was challenging to offer bespoke support and a varied curriculum to meet the needs of all students. These factors could potentially impact the likelihood of students becoming NEET due to impacts on their wellbeing, their feelings towards school, and the extent to which they feel a sense of competence and enjoyment in their learning. Similarly to the findings relating to targeting support, participants varied in the extent they felt able to overcome these barriers.

Given the described stretched capacity of schools, it was perhaps unsurprising that the support participants felt most beneficial was when it was beyond what a school could offer. In terms of involvement from the local careers service, this included the continuation of work over the holidays and mentoring support for those at risk of NEET. However, participants felt that the support from the local careers service was limited by the service no longer attending annual reviews for students with EHCPs and having strict referral criteria for support for those at risk of NEET.

Participants described the lack of availability of EPs for work outside of statutory assessments. Where EPs were involved in reducing NEET, it was usually indirectly. EPs were valued for their psychological understanding, cognitive assessment skills, and professional authority. It is possible the participants may have had different views around the extent to which EP involvement could contribute towards reducing NEET if they had experienced a broader range of EP work, particularly outside of statutory assessments.

4.4. Theme 5: The barriers beyond school

The theme *The barriers beyond school* centres on barriers that participants felt impacted NEET status after school. There were two subthemes: *Travel and the accessibility of courses*, and *The post-school environment.* This theme and associated subthemes are presented in Figure 7.
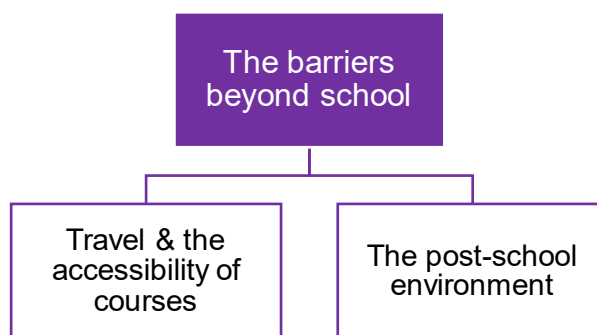
Figure 7. "The barriers beyond school" theme & subtheme.

4.4.1. Subtheme 5a: Travel & the availability of courses

Students' ability to travel to opportunities outside their local area was described as a barrier in all interviews. This barrier was multifaceted. Those in rural areas described poor travel infrastructure resulting in long (in some cases two hours each way) and expensive commutes that some families could not afford:

June (SENDCo): *We're very much at the end of many bus routes and transport is expensive.*

Participants described that students often feared leaving their local area and using public transport. This fear was sometimes compounded by concerns that parents had about their children studying several hours away from home:

Terri (SENDCo): *the idea of having to catch 2 buses to go to college. It is so daunting. And some, they're just going to fall between the gap.*

Joselyn (career leader): *their parents will go, "actually you can't. It's too far away"*

Although these fears were likely to be greater for students in rural communities facing longer commutes, participants from schools in better-connected areas also described students' fears around using public transport. In most interviews, it was also expressed that these difficulties around public transport were more significant for those with SEND and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated increased time students spent at home.

Participants made a link between the challenges associated with travel and the accessibility of courses for students with SEND and low attaining pupils. Participants described it was not so much that there was a lack of availability of courses; it was that these courses were not always accessible for these students. Participants at schools with sixth forms described that they were limited in the courses they were able to offer due to their resources and often did not have a range for students with SEND or low attaining students. It is also possible that budget priorities played a role here. The outcome of the limited provision in sixth forms, appeared to be that the students who may have found travelling the hardest and may have benefited from the continuity of a sixth form provision were also the ones most likely required to travel to an appropriate setting for post-16. This challenge is summarised in the below quote from a career leader:

Naomi (career leader): *I think the transport issue is a problem for some of those students who feel very secure here at (name of school) and because we used to offer*

level one and two programmes in sixth form, but we can't now. That is an issue for

some students who lack the confidence or the ability to travel.

As indicated by the quote in the following section by Shell (SENDCo), some schools supported students to overcome fears related to travel as part of their transition. However, other participants described the barriers related to travel but described referring to external services for support rather than feeling this was within the school's remit.   One SENDCo outlined the challenges in receiving this support:

Lisa (SENDCo): *you can make a referral for travel training, but what would be the biggest [help] would be if those referrals actually were responded to and turned around quickly.*

Where barriers to travel related to geographical reasons, the career leaders and SENDCos interviewed offered limited suggestions of possible ways to overcome these barriers, possibly suggesting this was an area that felt unchangeable. One participant's comment suggested it was a fact that some students went to courses that they did not want to do because of the barrier imposed by travel:

Lucy (career leader): *getting transport, and locality of where they live affects their choices, and perhaps that's when they only go to college to do something, that they didn't really want to do. So that can happen.*

4.4.2. Subtheme 5b: The post-school environment

Participants discussed that the post-school environment is a barrier for some students. They felt some students are not ready for the change and that some post-16 settings do not offer enough support.

Participants described that many students have fears about attending a new setting for post-16. Similarly to the previous theme of "*raising aspirations" and supporting informed choices*, participants suggested experiential opportunities support students' post-16 transitions. This support often involved physically taking students to their new settings and helping them practise taking the bus to overcome potential fears.

Martha (career leader): *me and (local careers service professional) have taken students before to (name of college) taken them to have a look around to show them actually what it is like (…) officially visit so they can meet the people there, you know. Lecturers and teachers and things. (…) 'cause some of them are quite scared, aren't they? You know they haven't been outside of (local area) and it's, you know, it's a big thing for them"*

Shell (SENDCo): *And if we've got young people for whom we think transition is going to be difficult, then we will support that. (…) I've released TAs [teaching assistants] to take students to their next provision in the summertime to go and try it out to get a feel for it. Decent transition work, to practise catching the bus, to prepare, packing your own bag. All of those sorts of things to make sure that the little hurdles which might prevent the child wanting to go to school or to college are overcome by the time they get to that September start and then we also try and go and visit them in the autumn term as well, those children who have left.*

There was considerable variation in what the schools felt they could offer in terms of post-16 transition. In contrast to the above quotes, one school felt limited in their capacity to offer visits to the post-16 settings, as indicated by the below exchange:

June (SENDCo): *If there was a way that we could help them get into colleges more beforehand.*

Nat (career leader): *I think they would have us over more often, but actually it's paying for the coach. And you know having that timeout because there's just me that organises that bit? Really, it's not as easy as it might sound.*

Another setting felt that the onus was placed heavily on schools for post-16 transition but that colleges could do more:

Terri (SENDCo): *I think there is still a big gap between the school and the college and I would like to see more people coming in and working with Keira [career leader]. And you know, narrowing that gap because you do an awful lot Keira to smooth it going that direction. But we don't have an awful lot coming back.*

Many participants described that the post-16 environment is less supportive for students than secondary school. They raised concerns that these settings focus less on relationships and support and require increased student independence. Several SENDCos raised concerns for "SEND K students" (students who access SEND support in school but do not have an EHCP) and lack of support, even when information was passed on to post-16 settings:

Shell (SENDCo): *For those K students for whom most of their academic life, they've had some form of support within the classroom and because they've had that often, it's more about that key adult, that relationship that they've built with somebody who's keeping them going through school, dealing with all the little wobbles, the little issues. When they go on to post 16 provision, it's not there. They're meant to cope in a far more independent way, even if in my experience, where we've passed that information on and said you are going to need to know about this child, please pick them up. It often doesn't happen.*

Many participants raised concerns that there was little the school could do to support when students left. Although, three participants described that their schools continued some form of support, including additional visits or attending reviews. Examples of differences in the continuity of support are provided below:

Susan (career leader): *we worry about these young people because once they've left we can't support them anymore, can we?*

Terri (SENDCo): *…students that are in the first year at college, I still do their reviews and things. So, we keep that handle (…) to ensure that we've got it, you know.*

Summary of Theme 5: The barriers beyond school

Participants described that after school, students faced barriers concerning travel and accessibility of courses, particularly the capacity of sixth forms to provide a range of courses for students with SEND and low attaining pupils, and a post-16 environment that participants felt was not supportive for all students. These barriers can be understood to impact in combination most on vulnerable students. The participants' comments suggest that those students who were most

likely to find travelling and the independence associated with the post-16 environment challenging, were the ones who were also the most likely to have to travel to a new setting and away from their local sixth form to find an appropriate course. Participants also described feeling particularly concerned about the support students with SEND but without an EHCP would receive in a post-16 setting. A notable aspect of the barriers impacting students beyond school was that these were barriers that participants appeared to feel the least able to overcome, although there was some variation.

4.5. Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the analysis from my joint semi-structured interviews with career leaders and SENDCos. The findings will be discussed in relation to my research questions, the literature, and psychological theories in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the interviews with the career leaders and SENDCos will be discussed in response to the three research questions, drawing on relevant literature and psychological theory.

I start with an initial exploration of research question 1: "How do career leaders and SENDCos perceive the role schools have in identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET?". As the response to this question is directly influenced by the comments career leaders and SENDCos gave about the strategies and challenges, my answer to research question 1 is built on in my response to research question 2 and exploration of psychological theory.

Then, research question 2: "What do career leaders and SENDCos perceive as challenges and successful strategies in this work?" is addressed, with the suggested strategies and challenges outlined. Next, I explore participants' responses to the two research questions using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995) and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). I then draw upon the totality of the participants' responses and the implications from the psychological theories to answer research question 3: "How can professionals work together to prevent NEET, and how might educational psychologists offer further support in this area?".

Next, a two-page guide for schools to use to aid them in their work in supporting students who are at risk of becoming NEET is introduced. The overall contribution to knowledge provided by my research is discussed.

As I have approached this research from a contextualist and reflexive position (refer to the methodology section), I recognise that my experiences and values will impact the interpretations I have made about my research. I have included a reflexive account in this chapter to consider the implications of this.

5.1. Research question 1: How do career leaders and SENDCos perceive the role schools have in identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET?

When designing my research, I had initially imagined that research question 1 could be answered in a distinct way from the other research questions. However, after gathering my data, it became apparent that the question can be best answered when considering the totality of the interview data and that the response to research question 2 directly informs it. Here, I make an initial response to research question 1. However, this is built upon in the answers to research question 2 and subsequent exploration of the psychological models.

When the themes discussed in the results section are considered together, it suggests that schools are perceived to have two key roles in reducing NEET. Firstly, as a whole school careers approach. As will be expanded upon in response to research question 2, participants identified several strategies that contribute towards this whole school focus on careers, these are raising aspirations and supporting students to make informed choices and creating a whole school ethos through staff members working together to identify those at-risk of NEET and providing nurturing relationships. The second role suggested by participants responses is providing targeted support for students and families that are identified as needing additional help and guidance. The strategies involved in these two areas of responsibility will be explored in response to research question 2, along with the relevant subthemes identified in the thematic analysis.

When responding to the question of the role that schools have in identifying and supporting students at risk of NEET, in addition to considering the strategies the participants suggested they used, it is also interesting to consider the totality of the participants' responses and how these relate to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995). As discussed in later parts of this chapter, participants described several broader contextual factors at the exosystem and macrosystem levels of Bronfenbrenner's model. However, the focus on the role of schools to deliver whole school approaches to careers and offering targeted support, suggests that schools view their role predominantly at the individual and microsystem level. This focus suggests that schools perceive

their role in reducing NEET largely as occurring within these more proximal levels rather than influencing more distal contextual factors. This idea will be explored in more depth in later parts of this chapter.

5.2. Research question 2: What do career leaders and SENDCos perceive as supportive strategies and challenges when supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET?

This section first explores the strategies that the career leaders and SENDCos described as helpful in reducing the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. Then, I explore challenges identified by participants in delivering this work.

5.2.1. Supportive strategies

The six key approaches identified by participants as helpful in reducing the likelihood of young people becoming NEET are shown in Figure 8. These strategies are taken directly from some of the themes and subthemes identified during the thematic analysis. Each strategy is then explored, drawing upon relevant literature.
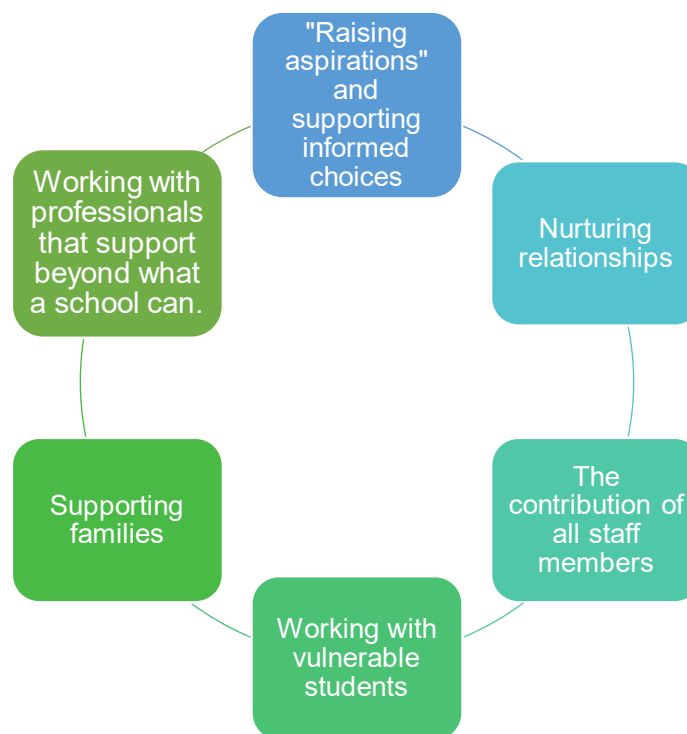
Figure 8. Successful strategies to support students at risk of NEET, identified by participants.

Strategy 1: 'Raising aspirations' & supporting informed choices

The interviews suggested that the career leaders and SENDCos perceived that one of the most important roles in preventing NEET was raising student aspirations and supporting students to make informed choices about their futures. Typically, the notion that low aspirations were a barrier for students moving into education, employment and training was the first and most extensively discussed barrier in the interviews. Support focused on this area was also the most universally described approach by participants. The prominence of this theme could suggest that schools feel that "raising aspirations" is an area which they are responsible for creating change for young people. The dominance of this belief set across participants may be related to the neoliberal ideologies that are common in UK politics. As described in the Introduction Chapter, when applied to youth, such ideologies focus on a responsibility to contribute to the economy and conform to normative conceptualisations of adulthood (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; McPherson, 2021). It is possible that school staff perceive young people as "at-risk" when their aspirations do not conform to traditional ideas of progression, i.e. to go to university, get a job, and contribute to the economy. It is possible that these perceptions focus the attention on aspirations as the key barrier and away from other vulnerability aspects. This last point is evident within one of the participant quotes described in the Results Chapter. The participant listed a number of reasons that impact where a young person is for post-16, but still emphasised the role of the young persons "aspirations" and need to "pull their finger out" (p.94).

Regarding approaches to raising student aspirations and supporting students to make informed choices, participants described career guidance, linking with post-16 providers, and experiential opportunities such as work experience to inspire young people and make them aware of possible options. This approach fits with suggestions in the literature review that an important part of supporting young people into future education and employment opportunities is providing them with opportunities for learning and personal growth. These responses are in line with the

governmental policy on the responsibility of schools to ensure students receive effective career guidance and education outlined in the current career guidance (DfE, 2021a). Participants' responses suggested that schools are working towards meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks, including benchmarks one, two, five, six, and seven (see Introduction Chapter).

However, as well as the benefits of an increased focus on careers, the idea that low aspirations can account for all the differences in education, employment, and training is limited. The notion has been said to perpetuate a within-child narrative and ignore the cultural and societal factors (Russell et al., 2011). As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, Hearne and Neary (2020) argue that the current statutory guidance perpetuates a within-child narrative by inferring that good career guidance can address the systemic inequality within educational systems and the labour market. They suggest this focuses on creating change within the individual rather than addressing the social, community and economic influences that may impact an individual's opportunities.

A within-child narrative was evident in some of the responses. For instance, there was sometimes a feeling of blame in participants' responses. This blame was directed towards the young person or their parents, using words such as "if they had pulled their finger out" (p. 94) or describing parental lack of "work ethic" (p.94). This finding is interesting to consider alongside the paper by Simmons et al. (2014), which found that NEET young people tended to see themselves as the cause of their situation, even when they were aware of structural factors such as poverty and labour market opportunities. It is possible that these feelings of blame become internalised by young people.

However, participants' responses did not wholly perpetuate a within-child narrative. Their responses suggested they were also aware of broader contextual factors that impacted students moving into future education, employment, and training. When participants discussed young people's aspirations, these were framed in the influence of their family and context. Participants discussed that the students lived in rural areas, often areas of deprivation, and described that

young people's aspirations were influenced by the opportunities available in their local area and their parents' jobs. This view is not dissimilar to research discussed in the literature review, which found that NEET young people's aspirations were often impacted by their perception of the available opportunities (Lawy & Wheeler, 2013; Wenham, 2020; Simmons et al., 2014).

To summarise, a key focus for the participants was the importance of raising aspirations through effective career guidance and education. This response is in keeping with the current statutory career guidance for schools. It is likely to be supportive in providing young people with a range of new experiences and ideas for the future. However, there was an apparent primacy to the extent that they discussed aspirations and offered career guidance as the solution to NEET. Sometimes this was coupled with suggestions of blame. Despite this focus on aspirations, participants also recognised contextual factors. The responses around aspirations suggest that participants held conflicting perceptions that moved between recognising contextual influences and using within-child narratives.

Strategy 2: The contribution of all staff members

Participants identified another facilitative strategy in reducing the likelihood of young people becoming NEET was a school ethos in which all staff members had a role. School leaders were viewed as crucial in creating a focus on careers, and school staff were seen to maintain this collectively. School staff had distinct roles in this. For instance, staff in pastoral roles were valued for their understanding of individual students, SENDCos were valued for their ability to support SEND, and career leaders were seen as having overall responsibility for reducing NEET rates and finding opportunities. Many of the participants described that within a school culture that valued and focused on careers, much of the communication around concerns happened on an ad hoc basis, with the necessary actions then undertaken by the most appropriate staff member.

Participants' descriptions of this web of support represent a strength in the position schools have in providing support for pupils at risk of NEET. Research conducted by Hoggarth and Smith (2004) into the Connexions Service suggested that as an organisation that existed externally from

schools, it was not always possible to identify those at risk of NEET and that there were sometimes barriers in working jointly with schools. However, arguably, within the current statutory guidance, which places the responsibility of providing career education and guidance with schools, those at risk of NEET can be identified earlier and supported more promptly within a team of staff jointly working towards these outcomes. Additionally, the career leader role was thought pivotal in implementing this focus, suggesting a strength of this aspect of the current career policy.

Strategy 3: Nurturing relationships

Participants felt that an important part of reducing the likelihood of students becoming NEET was building relationships with students and creating a nurturing environment. Participants described that by developing staff and student relationships, students felt able to go to staff when there was an issue. The staff also knew students well enough to notice and share potential concerns relating to future opportunities.

This finding fits with the research discussed in the literature review. A prominent theme in both the prevention and re-engagement literature was the importance of relationships and a nurturing environment. For instance, relationships with teachers and professionals delivering preventative programmes and peers were found to be a key supportive factor identified by "at-risk" of NEET young people and relevant professionals (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Ryan et al., 2019; McCrone, & Bamford, 2016; Arnold & Baker, 2013). Additionally, studies into youth work and intervention groups found that nurturing, tailored, and relationship-focused environments were crucial elements of change for the confidence and empowerment of young people (Wignall, 2019; Miller et al., 2015; Robertson, 2018; Denton-Calabrese et al., 2021; Phillips, 2010). The focus on relationships suggested in the interviews, therefore, indicates a strength in the support schools offer in preventing students from becoming NEET.

Strategy 4: Working with vulnerable students

As part of their role in offering targeted support, participants described that their schools tended to pay particular attention and offer more extensive support to students based on characteristics such as SEND, pupil premium, or children in care. They also discussed increasingly focusing on young people with SEMH needs, autism, and, in particular, those experiencing emotionally-based school avoidance.

These descriptions suggest that schools recognise that certain groups of young people may be more at risk of NEET than others. This notion fits with the statistics described in the Introduction Chapter, which highlight that young people from low-income families, those with SEND, and children in care are among those who have an increased risk of becoming NEET (DfE, 2018a). However, a striking finding was that three participants described children in care as less of a concern because of the support already around them. This perception is surprising as NEET trends place this group at the highest risk (DfE, 2018a). This finding suggests that schools recognise that some students are at greater risk of becoming NEET. However, some may underestimate the potential risk for children in care.

A strength of using targeted approaches alongside whole-school approaches to identify and support those at risk of NEET is that schools can focus on those more likely to need additional support (i.e., vulnerable students). However, they can also think beyond these categories and offer support to students they notice are at risk for any reason. Some of the research discussed in the literature review highlighted the heterogeneity of the NEET category. For instance, studies found that not all NEET young people had low academic attainment or were from low-income families (Maguire, 2018; Lorinc et al., 2020; Simmons et al., 2014; Pemberton, 2008). Services offering support for students at risk of NEET may be subject to referral criteria and, therefore, may be unable to provide support for students that are not deemed 'vulnerable'. Indeed, participants in the current research discussed the limitations of the referral criteria for the local careers service. Arguably, these examples suggest that schools are well placed to identify and support students who would not be identified through specific characteristics alone.

Related to the above point, participants discussed that there has been an increase in students experiencing emotionally-based school avoidance. Participants felt that these students were at greater risk of becoming NEET. An increase in persistent absenteeism is apparent in recent governmental statistics (not including non-attendance in COVID circumstances) (DfE, 2022, January 25), and there have been suggestions in the news that this is related to an increase in emotionally-based school avoidance (BBC News, 2021, September 15). As support within schools tends to be less bounded by specific referral criteria, schools can be responsive to changing climates and offer support to students, such as those experiencing emotionally-based school avoidance, who may otherwise slip between measured 'risk factors'.

In summary, in line with NEET statistics, participants recognised that some students may be more at risk of NEET than others and that schools have a role in targeting support. This approach can address some systemic imbalances in the likelihood of different groups of young people becoming NEET. A strength of the approach taken by schools is that, unlike some services, they can be responsive and target emerging areas of need, such as students experiencing emotionally-based school avoidance. A striking finding was that some participants discussed that children in care were less of a concern due to the support this group already received.

Strategy 5: Supporting families

Participants described that part of their responsibility in offering targeted support is working with families. Participants described a range of reasons parents may need additional help, including those with children with SEND, who have SEND themselves, families with English as an additional language, and parents who may find it more difficult than others to navigate the system and the next steps. Studies discussed in the literature review indicated that support from families is important for young people's engagement with school (Ryan et al., 2019) and when re-engaging from a period of being NEET (Rose et al., 2012; Buchanan & Tuckerman, 2016; Phillips, 2010; Gabriel, 2015). Thus, the focus placed on supporting families by the SENDCos and career

leaders interviewed is consistent with the literature in suggesting that families have an influential role in preventing NEET.

Furthermore, it has been well documented that navigating the SEND system and making choices for school placement is a bureaucratic process that privileges families with access to social and financial capital (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019; Bajwa-Patel, 2014; Smith, 2020). Therefore, support offered to families, such as that described in the interviews, can help to ameliorate some of the structural barriers within the system.

Strategy 6: Working with professionals that support beyond what a school can.

The final successful approach discussed by participants was working with external professionals. Participants discussed working with a range of people to prevent students from becoming NEET. These included the local careers service, advice and guidance professionals, post-16 providers, and local businesses, suggesting that schools have links with a range of external services. Participants talked at the greatest length about the local careers service because they felt this was the service that was most involved in reducing NEET. Additionally, the EPS was discussed at length because of specific questions I asked relating to the research aims. A notable aspect was that support from both of these services was viewed as effective when it went beyond what a school felt able to offer.

Support from the local careers service was considered helpful for several reasons. Firstly, professionals were able to advise on a range of post-16 opportunities, especially bespoke options, suggesting this is not an area all schools felt knowledgeable in. Secondly, professionals offered support to young people at home or over the school holidays. This support was helpful for students who were not attending or had not secured an opportunity by the end of term. Thirdly, the service offered mentoring support for those identified as at risk of NEET. These responses suggest that flexibility, knowledge of provision, and tailored approaches are areas of support that schools value from the local careers service, possibly because these are the areas that schools feel least equipped to provide.

Participants suggested that support from EPs was usually indirect. For instance, as part of the EHCP process, overcoming school avoidance issues or preventing exclusions, rather than reducing the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET as the primary reason for referral. Similarly to the research discussed in the literature review (Turner-Forbes, 2017; Brown, 2021; Gabriel, 2015), participants valued EPs' psychological understanding and skills in highlighting potential barriers for young people as they move into future education, employment, or training. Particularly valued were EPs use of cognitive assessments, knowledge of anxiety, relational approaches, and other mental health needs. Similarly to the research conducted by Brown (2021) and Gabriel (2015), some participants also felt EPs were able to "dig deeper" in understanding young people's views and needs. However, one SENDCo felt that EP support added little to what they already knew in their school.

Participants also identified that a valued aspect of EP input is their "professional authority", which helped secure support for students. Such a view could be considered to focus on provision gained from EP involvement rather than valuing the psychological input. EPs have sometimes been viewed as gatekeepers to resources due to their role in statutory assessments (Miller & Frederickson, 2006). The SENDCos responses suggest that this is a view that persists today. This perception may be related to current strains in the SEND system (explored in more detail below), which necessitates significant evidence to gain resources. Although this view of the input of EPs is somewhat limited, as part of my response to research question 3, I will explore how EPs could use this "professional authority" to support schools in reducing the likelihood of students becoming NEET.

Overall, participants valued support from the local careers service and EPS when it went beyond what they were able to offer in school. Both services assisted schools in working with vulnerable students and those most at risk of NEET. In the following section, I will explore the challenges in providing support raised in the interviews.

5.2.2. Challenges

The SENDCos and career leaders identified three areas of challenge in supporting students at risk of NEET. These challenges are taken directly from the themes and subthemes identified in the thematic analysis:

1) The capacity within school.

2) The capacity of external services.

3) The barriers experienced beyond school including travel, accessibility of courses, and the post-school environment.

Figure 9 indicates how these three challenges overlap. A lack of capacity in a school will be felt more acutely when external services are also stretched and vice versa. Additionally, when these systems are stretched, the capacity to overcome some of the barriers young people experience beyond school will also be impacted. I explore these three challenges alongside relevant literature in the remainder of this section.
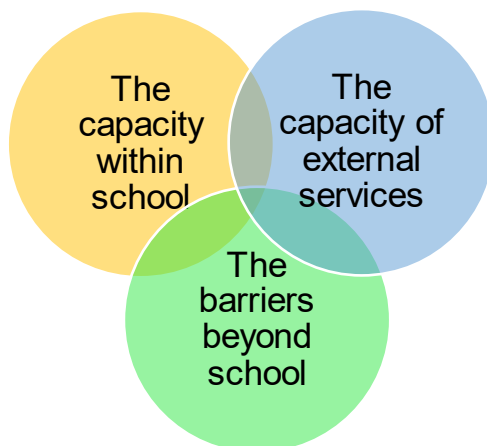
Figure 9. The challenges in preventing students from becoming NEET identified by participants.

Challenge 1: The capacity within school

In the interviews, participants described the broader picture in terms of school capacity to meet the needs of students; this included reduced funding in schools, an increase in students with

SEND, governmental pressure to reach specific attainment requirements, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For some, there was a feeling that the combination of these pressures meant it was challenging to offer bespoke support and a varied curriculum to meet the needs of all students, which was considered, in turn, to impact the likelihood of students becoming NEET. This suggestion links with descriptions of young people considered 'at-risk' of NEET discussed in the literature review (Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson, 2016). Young people described a desire for more vocational options as some academic subjects were uninteresting and lacking in relevance.

The participants' responses echo broader literature on the current pressure schools face. Funding shortfalls in schools and limitations in how funding is allocated for SEND have been identified in two recent governmental reviews of the SEND system (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019; DfE, 2022). As part of the 2021 Spending Review, the Government committed an extra £4.7 billion for school funding. However, the Committee of Public Accounts (2022, February) review suggested that the pledged 4.7 billion will be insufficient to cover cost pressures, particularly with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly to the participants' descriptions, the review found that schools have had to reduce the curriculum and support for pupils with SEND in response to these financial pressures.

Some participants felt that NEET rates are impacted by governmental pressure to reach specific attainment requirements and the associated lack of flexibility schools have in delivering a varied and supportive curriculum. The limitations placed on schools by the current attainment framework have also been noted in the wider literature. Since 2016 schools have been measured using Progress 8 (DfE, 2015), which aims to map the academic progression of a pupil from Year 6 to the end of secondary school across eight curriculum areas. The measure has received some support from education professionals. Some argue it incentivises schools to focus on individual pupil progress rather than raw outcomes and promotes entitlement to a broad curriculum for all students (Francis et al., 2017). However, as suggested by participants in the current study, research has indicated that, in reality, schools have less flexibility to deviate from a mandated

curriculum and teach in ways that are responsive to student's diverse needs and capabilities, including offering vocational and creative subjects (Gerwitz et al., 2021; Cole et al., 2019). Similarly to the participants' views, research has suggested that a consequence of the accountability framework is that it focuses attention on attainment and away from SEND needs and student wellbeing (Cole et al., 2019).

Participants' descriptions of the strained capacity within schools indicate both the broader issues that schools face and how these factors specifically impact on the support offered to those at risk of becoming NEET.

Challenge 2: The capacity of external services

An additional challenge described by participants was the capacity of external services to offer support. These descriptions focused on the local careers service and the EPS. As previously described, the prevalence of these two services in responses was because participants felt the local careers service is the most involved company in preventing NEET and due to the questions asked about support from the EPS.

Participants felt that the support from the local careers service was limited in two ways. Firstly, the service no longer attends annual reviews for students with EHCPs, which participants felt made it more challenging to offer joined-up support between services and meant admin and communication had to be duplicated. Secondly, participants described that the service has strict referral criteria for those at risk of NEET, which meant that not all students were able to access support. Participants discussed worrying particularly about "SEND K students" (students who have SEND support in school but do not have an EHCP) who were unable to access support from the service.

The literature review also highlighted the lack of capacity of services providing support for students at risk of NEET. For instance, the professionals interviewed in Gabriel's paper (2015) described changes in resourcing which affected the stability of programmes and reduced their referral criteria. Hoggarth and Smith (2004) also found that the Connexions advisors had limited

capacity and had to stop some support early. Similarly, in the study by Brown (2021), professionals stated several barriers in their work, including budgeting, time restrictions, and coordinating professionals for multiagency working.

Participants in the current research also described the lack of availability of EPs. They explained that they mostly saw EPs for statutory work. Many schools described wanting to have more involvement from the EPS, but this was not possible due to their availability. One school had chosen to use a private EP instead. These comments reflect the broader pressure that the EP profession faces in delivering its statutory work. The demand for EHCP assessments has increased yearly since the legislation came into place in 2014 (Office of National Statistics, 2021). This increase has also coincided with staffing shortages within the EP profession, nationally (Lyonette et al., 2019). Participants' responses suggest that the cumulative impact of these pressures in this locality is that EPs have limited time to support schools outside of statutory work, including preventing NEET.

Challenge 3: The barriers beyond school

The career leaders and SENDCos described several interrelating barriers beyond school that increased the likelihood of students becoming NEET: travel, the accessibility of courses, and the post-school environment.

Similarly to the research described in the literature review (Simmons et al., 2014; Wenham, 2020), participants expressed that poor travel links and expensive commutes often limited young people's options for post-16. Additionally, the participants described that young people were often fearful of taking public transport and leaving their local area. These fears were thought to be greater for those with SEND, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and, in some cases, coupled with parental concerns about their child studying several hours away from home. Therefore, participant's responses suggest that the likelihood of a young person being able to travel to a post-16 setting is impacted by structural factors (for instance, travel links), individual

factors (such as having SEND), parental influence (for example, their fears), and context, (such as experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Participants' responses suggested travel was a barrier that particularly impacted low attaining students and those with SEND because of the availability of courses at sixth forms. Participants described that due to funding shortfalls, they were limited in the range of courses they could offer at sixth form, especially for those with SEND or low attaining students. This finding concurs with literature highlighting limited post-school opportunities for learners with SEND (Smart, 2004; House of Commons Education Committee, 2019). Participants suggested that a consequence was that students who may have found travelling the hardest and benefited the most from the continuity of a sixth form provision were also the ones most likely required to travel for post-16. This finding is interesting to consider in terms of the statistics discussed in the Introduction Chapter, which highlight that young people with SEND or low attainment are more vulnerable to becoming NEET (DfE, 2018a). It is a possibility that the availability of courses within the sixth form environment, at least in this local authority, could be an influencing factor in these statistics.

Participants also raised concerns about the post-school environment, describing that the settings often have less of a focus on relationships and student support. They felt that many students were not ready for the independence associated with the post-16 environment. Again, there were particular concerns about "SEND K" students, with participants describing that without an EHCP, they were less likely to receive the support they needed. These concerns echo findings of the House of Commons Education Committee (2019) review, which highlighted a lack of inclusivity in post-16 settings for students with SEND and parental concerns of a lack of support for students without an EHCP.

5.2.3. Summary of successful strategies and challenges

The career leaders and SENDCos interviewed identified several facilitators and barriers when working to prevent students from becoming NEET.

These strategies included "raising aspirations" & supporting informed choices, the contribution of all staff members, nurturing relationships, supporting vulnerable students, working with families, and working with professionals that support beyond what a school can. These approaches can be considered influenced in part by the Government's statutory guidance for supporting careers in schools (DfE, 2021). They can also help ameliorate some of the inequalities in moving into education, employment, and training which are evident in the NEET statistics (DfE, 2018a). There were some limitations in the perceptions. For instance, there was an emphasis on aspirations and sometimes perceptions of blame, which suggest a focus on within-child narratives. Some participants also underestimated the vulnerability of children in care becoming NEET.

However, overall, these strategies suggest that there is potential for schools to have significant reach in preventing students from becoming NEET. This proposal is based upon participant discussions around their ability to offer a nurturing environment for students, have access to families to provide additional support, offer new experiences to inspire young people about their future and create a web of support amongst staff members to respond to students' needs. Arguably, schools that are intervening in each of these areas and utilising their staffing resources, can be considered well placed to offer preventative support in the area of NEET.

The participants also discussed some challenges in supporting students, noting the lack of capacity within school and external services, such as the local careers service and EPS. These challenges concur with the broader pressure schools, and external services are experiencing. Additionally, participants described several barriers beyond school which impacted their ability to support young people into post-16 settings. These barriers included travel links, students' ability to travel, the availability of courses (especially for low attaining students and those with SEND), and a post-16 environment that was not always inclusive and supportive enough.

5.3. Applying psychological theory to research questions 1 & 2

As described in the Literature Review Chapter, one of the research aims was to use psychological theories to understand the support offered in schools to prevent young people from

becoming NEET. Two theories outlined in the literature review as relevant to NEET are Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995) and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), which I explore with the findings for research questions 1 and 2. It felt most appropriate to explore these theories before answering the third research question so that the implications of the theories could inform my response.

5.3.1. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

As described in the Literature Review Chapter, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995) posited that human development is impacted by a bidirectional, dynamic and complex interaction of individual factors and contextual systems called the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. This section will first describe the participants' responses on the factors impacting the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. Then, I explore where in the model schools appear to focus their support for students.

The participants' responses indicated complex interacting factors impact the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET. Factors were described for each area of the Bioecological Model. At the individual level, participants noted the impact of aspirations, low income, attainment, SEND, and emotional factors such as anxiety. Participants also noted factors within the microsystem, such as the support they received within school, relationships with school staff, and the influence of parents' aspirations, capacity to support, and knowledge of the education system. There was also an acknowledgement of the mesosystem and how elements of the microsystem interacted. For instance, the role that schools have in working with parents. Additionally, they described the impact of the transition from school to post-16 settings, which as O'Toole et al. (2019) described, is a time when two microsystems interact.

The participants also noted the role of the exosystem. For instance, they described the support received from external services and the barriers relating to the capacity of these services. Also, within the exosystem, participants described the impact of opportunities in their local context, travel links, the accessibility of settings, the range of courses, and the post-16 environment. These

factors were described to interact with individual characteristics such as SEND, attainment, and anxiety.

The influence of the macrosystem on the likelihood of young people becoming NEET and the capacity of schools to offer preventative support was also evident in the interviews. Schools' approach to preventing NEET appeared to be influenced by the current governmental career guidance (DfE, 2021), evident in their responses about the increased focus on career education and guidance within schools. The statutory guidance seems to have raised the profile of careers support and means that schools now have a dedicated person (the career leader) responsible for the implementation. However, the ease with which schools could support students appeared impacted by other factors within the macrosystem, such as school funding, the capacity of external services, and a governmental focus on attainment.

In terms of the chronosystem, the most discussed change experienced by young people and schools was the COVID-19 pandemic. School staff described that the pandemic impacted young people emotionally, increased non-attendance, and meant young people had reduced experience in using transport. They felt each of these factors had a potential impact on the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. The pandemic was also described as having negatively impacted the capacity to offer experiential experiences for young people, such as work experience and visits to settings.

The participants' responses, therefore, indicate that the likelihood of becoming NEET is impacted by complex interacting factors at multiple levels. Figure 10 shows the interacting processes in the systems relevant to understanding NEET based on the interviews.
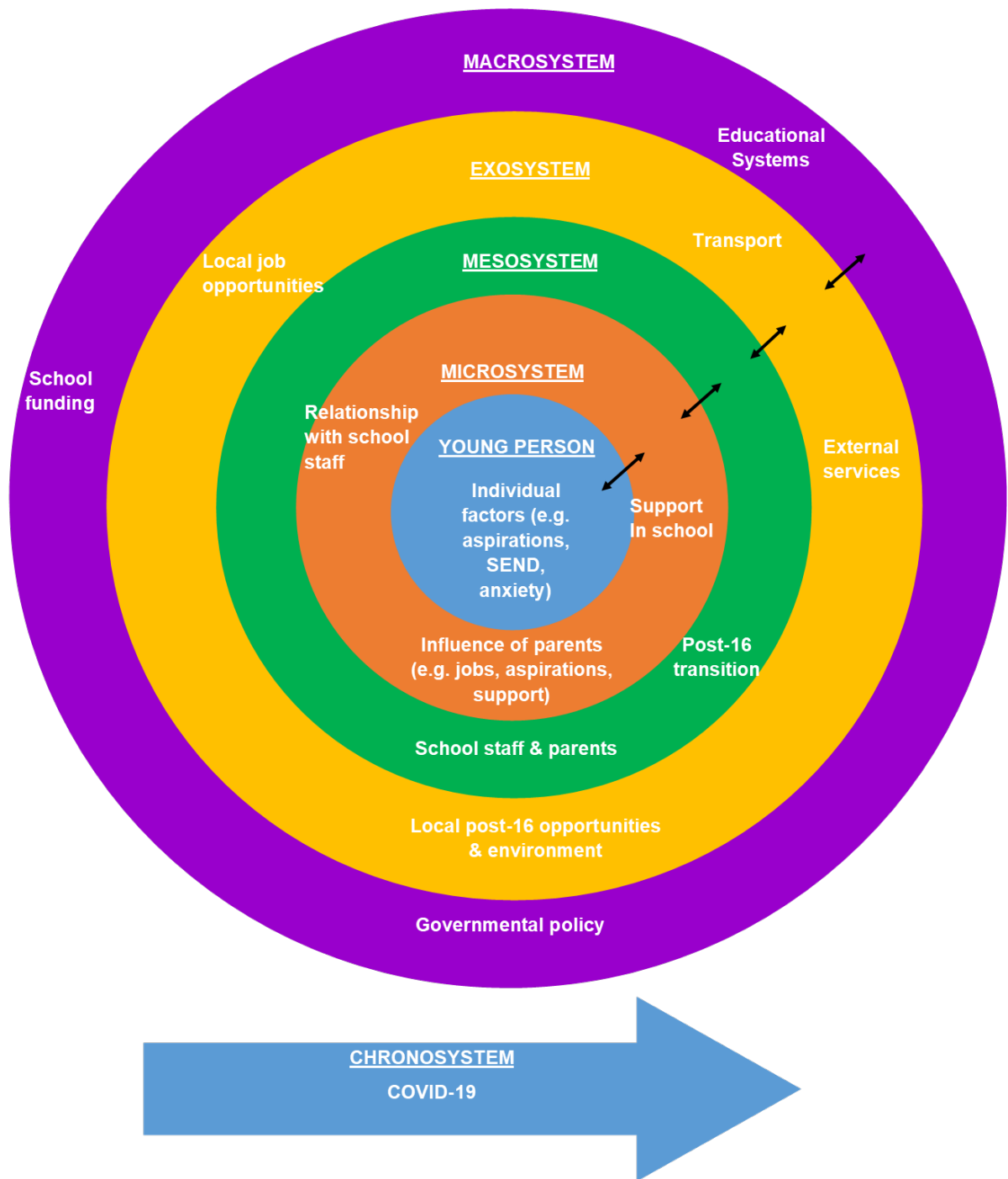
Figure 10. Using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model to understand the interacting factors relating to the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET.

Which areas of Bronfenbrenner's model do schools focus on when supporting students at risk of NEET?

As described previously, applying Bronfenbrenner's model to participants' responses can also help answer research question 1 on the role schools are perceived to have in reducing NEET. Although the participants described influencing factors at multiple levels, the areas in the interviews where support was most focused tended to be at the individual and microsystem level. As previously discussed, using career guidance and education to raise aspirations and support students to make informed choices about their futures was the most universally and extensively discussed area of support. Work in these areas represents an approach mainly at the individual and microsystem level. Similarly, the descriptions of supporting vulnerable students and parents predominantly represent support at the microsystem level.

Comparatively, there was much more variation in terms of the extent schools felt able to overcome barriers in the exosystem. Some schools supported students in overcoming fears related to travel and attending a new environment through post-16 transition, for instance, by physically taking them to settings and on buses. Some also continued offering support for students once they attended a post-16 setting, such as visits or attending reviews. However, others described these barriers as challenging to overcome. For instance, one career leader suggested that the school did not have enough money to pay for coaches for transition visits. Another SENDCo described it was difficult to overcome barriers to travel because the travel training offered by the local authority was unresponsive, suggesting the SENDCo felt this was not the direct responsibility of schools to solve. Some thought that the responsibility of preparing students for post-16 lay too heavily with schools and that post-16 providers could do more to support them. Throughout all the interviews, there was a consistent inference that geographical barriers to travel were a fixed problem, suggesting this was an area in which schools felt they had less responsibility and capacity to create change.

There was also variation in how schools felt they could overcome barriers impacted by the macrosystem relating to funding and a governmental focus on attainment. Many participants' responses suggested the situation was fixed and unchangeable, whereas one SENDCo listed an

extended range of vocational and bespoke courses offered at their school. Her responses suggested that although funding was limited, she felt it should not be a barrier. She described that it was about creatively using limited resources. Her response indicated that she had agency within the school to impact how funding was spent, which was possibly not something all the SENDCos and career leaders felt they had. It is also possible that there was actual variation in schools' resources and funding, limiting what was realistically possible.

Summary of the research and Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

Participants' responses suggest that the likelihood of young people becoming NEET is impacted by a combination of interacting factors at the individual level and the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Participants described barriers at each of these levels and how contextual factors impacted on their capacity to offer support. Their responses suggest that the barriers they feel most able to overcome are those at the individual and microsystem levels. There was more variation in the extent participants felt able to create change in the exosystem relating to travel, courses, and the post-school environment. Similarly, participants were varied in the extent they felt able to overcome barriers influenced by the macrosystem, such as the curriculum and funding in schools. This variation could be linked to several factors, such as the extent participants felt able to influence spending and practice, the schools' ethos, and financial stability. Overall, the interviews suggest that schools have the most capacity and feel the greatest responsibility to create change at the individual and microsystem level, in comparison to broader contextual influences, which seemed harder to overcome.

5.3.2. Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000)

As described in the literature review section, Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000) suggests three psychological needs must be fulfilled to meet optimal levels of personal growth and development: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Participants' responses relating to these three needs are explored below.

Autonomy

Overall, the interviews suggested that the support offered in schools to prevent young people from becoming NEET was both inhibitive and facilitative of young people's autonomy. On the one hand, participants spoke of seeking to provide students with experiential opportunities to promote an awareness of a greater range of post-16 opportunities and future careers. This approach could support autonomy by affording students more freedom in deciding their next steps. Additionally, participants suggested that part of a school's role was to help students think of opportunities beyond the ones available to them in their local area or their parents' job roles. This strategy could be understood as autonomy promoting as it infers that young people are encouraged to choose beyond what they have experienced in their local area.

However, participants also described support that was autonomy inhibiting. Some participants seemed to infer that particular aspirations were better than others, often leaning towards academic qualifications over technical ones. One participant also described taking control of a young person's transition and telling the family, "… this is where they're going in September. We've done it.". These findings are surprising given governmental guidance around the 'Baker Clause', which posits that schools should work in line with their statutory responsibility to avoid biasing academic opportunities over technical ones (DfE, 2021b). It also suggests that rather than supporting student autonomy, there was an inference that 'schools know best'.

Participants responses therefore created a contradiction. On the one hand participants suggested they were supporting autonomy by encouraging young people to think beyond the influences of their parents or context. However, rather than valuing the young person's autonomy and choices, there was a suggestion that schools knew what was best for the young person.

Competence

The interviewees' responses suggested that there was a recognition that feeling competent was important for students to successfully transition to future education, employment, and training. This recognition was evident in the considerations around the importance of targeting support and the acknowledgement that some needed additional help in making plans and

transitioning into post-16 opportunities. Participants also noted the impact of areas where students lacked competence, such as where they did not feel confident taking a bus or attending a new setting. Similarly, they identified barriers within the curriculum that impacted some students' enjoyment of school and feelings of competence. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, these barriers were more complicated for some schools to overcome than others.

Participants' responses suggest that feelings of competence around post-16 transition, travel, and the school curriculum were potential barriers to them moving into education, employment, or training for some young people. The responses indicate that the psychological need for competence was not met for these students and could potentially impact their likelihood of becoming NEET.

Relatedness

Participants' responses around providing nurturing support suggested that they recognised that relatedness was an essential need for students and one they tried to meet within schools. Additionally, the work that participants described that schools offered parents could be understood as a recognition that parents are significant avenues of support for young people. Providing support to parents may have benefits for the support the young people experience at home when moving into future education, employment, and training.

Participants also noted that a barrier for students was fear of going to a new environment with unfamiliar adults and peers. They also queried whether some post-16 settings offer relational support to students who need it. These responses further highlight that schools recognise the importance of relatedness for students. The responses also suggest that a lack of relatedness after young people leave school could potentially be an influencing factor in becoming NEET.

Summary of the research findings and Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory

There was an implicit recognition of the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within participants' responses. There were strategies to support students at each of these levels. However, there were also areas where these needs were not

met, suggesting possible avenues where support could be expanded. This suggestion will be explored further in response to the final research question.

5.4. Research question 3: How can professionals work together to prevent NEET, and how might educational psychologists offer further support in this area?

This section will draw on my research findings to consider how schools can best work with the local careers service, the EPS, and the local authority to support students at risk of NEET.

5.4.1. The Local Careers Service

The SENDCos and career leaders valued the support they received from the local careers service in reducing NEET. However, as previously discussed, the participants felt that the changes to the service, which mean link professionals no longer attend annual reviews and only students who meet certain referral criteria can access support, are unhelpful. Suggesting that if resourcing allowed, increasing support in these two areas would be beneficial

5.4.2. The Educational Psychology Service

As discussed, the lack of capacity of the EPS was prevalent in all the responses. SENDCos suggested that EPs were primarily involved in statutory assessments, and there is a waiting list of students requiring support outside of this. Therefore, descriptions of EP involvement in reducing NEET were unsurprisingly limited and prevalent only through indirect work. This finding is interesting to consider in terms of suggestions in the literature that the increase in the role of EPs in the 16-25 age range and the recent career guidance presents an opportunity for the position of EPs in reducing NEET to be expanded (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018). The participants' responses suggest that this increased role has not yet been realised, at least in part related to the current capacity of the EPS. This finding indicates that currently, in this local authority, the most appropriate support EPs can offer in schools relating to reducing NEET is possibly within the support that EPs already provide. In considering what this could look like, I will draw upon the challenges outlined by participants and some of the areas they focused on in terms of EP support. Below I discuss four possible areas of support that EPs could offer.

1) *Changing perceptions*

Building on Cockerill and Arnold's (2018) suggestion that EPs have a role in helping schools to understand the psychological aspects that contribute to young people becoming NEET, EPs could reformulate some of the perceptions around aspirations being the most important factor relating to NEET. EPs could help school staff recognise the interacting factors at multiple levels. This support could involve reframing the language used to describe young people. For instance, rather than stating that a young person has "low aspirations", a young person may be described as needing "additional support to overcome barriers". EPs could support schools to frame NEET as a social justice issue rather than an individual one.

2) *Supporting schools in overcoming contextual barriers*

As well as changing perceptions around what contributes to the likelihood of young people becoming NEET, EPs could support schools to overcome some of the identified barriers in supporting students into education, employment, and training. This support could draw upon one of the areas of EP support that participants valued, their "professional authority". As previously discussed, there was considerable variation in the extent schools felt able to overcome some of the barriers relating to the exosystem and macrosystem, such as funding, offering a varied curriculum, travel, and the post-16 environment. EPs could help overcome some of these barriers by advocating for the needs of young people during involvement with schools, in reports, and recommendations. EPs could make explicit links between the barriers and the likelihood of young people becoming NEET to underline the relevance and importance of the work. EP support could involve:

- Outlining the importance of supporting students in overcoming fears relating to travel and attending a new setting.
- Suggesting what is reasonable to provide in terms of alternative arrangements and transition support.

- Working with SENDCos to empower them to challenge what is prioritised and think creatively about funding and curriculum to balance the needs of all students.

- Emphasising the need for schools and post-16 provisions to work together to support students' transition to post-16.

- Additionally, the barriers that participants and the wider literature highlighted in terms of inclusivity and support within post-16 settings for vulnerable students and those with SEND suggest that EPs could work with post-16 settings to overcome these limitations.

3) *Using psychological knowledge of barriers, support, and transition*

Similarly to the research discussed in the literature review (Turner-Forbes, 2017; Brown, 2021; Gabriel, 2015), participants' responses suggested that EP support is valued for their psychological knowledge. Within EP consultation practice, assessment, and the gathering of young person views, EPs can use their psychological knowledge to identify barriers to young people moving into education, employment, and training. It could be helpful to use Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000) to support schools in their approaches to preventing NEET. The interview responses suggested that although schools use some systems that support student autonomy, competence, and relatedness, there were still some barriers in these areas. EPs could work with schools to bring these needs to the forefront of their attention when considering students who may be at risk of NEET and suggest areas of support that promote a young person's autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Additionally, as a key challenge identified in the interviews was the barriers beyond school, EPs could work with schools to support them in preparing students as they transition to post-16 settings. This work is important considering the variation in transition practices evident in the participant responses. The potential of EPs to support with post-16 transition has been noted in the literature. A literature review conducted by Morris and Atkinson (2018) found EPs could be involved at the individual and systemic level. These roles included conducting assessment of

needs, gathering the young person's views, working with families, reducing variability in transition planning, developing supportive provision and early intervention practices. EPs could use their skills in these areas to support schools with their transition planning, which could help to reduce overall NEET rates.

4) Raising awareness of need

Previously, EPs have suggested that the profession could have a role in the early identification of those at risk of NEET (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Currie & Goodall, 2009). Neither of these suggestions were prevalent in the responses from participants in the current research. Since the previous research was conducted, these areas may have become less of a concern. Schools' increased focus and responsibility in supporting students' careers outlined in the current career strategy and career leader role may have made schools feel more equipped to identify those at risk of NEET and work with external agencies. However, some of the participants' responses around children in care being less of a concern suggests that EPs still have a role in raising awareness of the increased vulnerability of this group of young people.

5.4.3. Local Authority & Government

Participants' responses also suggest that many systemic barriers impact the likelihood of students becoming NEET. These highlight general resourcing shortfalls which impact the capacity of external services and schools. The interviews suggest particular issues around travel links and accessibility of courses for students with SEND and low attaining pupils in this local authority. This suggests that greater investment is needed in travel links locally and that more could be done at a strategic level in this local authority. For instance, representatives from schools, colleges and the local authority could meet to identify where the travel links are the poorest and where alternative arrangements may be needed. This work could involve thinking responsively and creatively to meet need, for instance, considering whether there are sixth forms that require additional funding to run courses, additional means of transportation, or accessible micro-campuses located closer to hard-to-reach areas.

Although this research represents the situation in this local authority, the findings offer implications more broadly for local authorities to work jointly with schools and colleges to consider the barriers for young people moving into further education and consider areas of investment and change.

The barriers also highlight broader issues relating to government funding of infrastructure and education systems, calling for greater resourcing in these areas. Additionally, the research has highlighted that although career leaders and SENDCos are aware of a range of contextual influences impacting the likelihood of young people becoming NEET, their support in this area tends to be at the individual level. In the Government's statutory guidance for careers in schools, it is possible that greater attention needs to be raised of the structural factors that impact young people moving into future opportunities and the role schools have in ameliorating these barriers.

Summary of Research question 3: How can professionals work together to prevent NEET, and how might educational psychologists offer further support in this area?

In this section, I have considered how the local careers service, EPS, local authority and Government can work with schools to reduce the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. In terms of the local careers service, based on participants' responses, I have suggested that support could be expanded so that the service still attends annual reviews and offers support for young people outside of strict referral criteria. I acknowledge that currently, due to the capacity of the service, the most appropriate support from the EPS is within the work that is already provided in schools. This could focus on four key areas: changing perceptions (especially reducing the emphasis on aspirations), helping schools to overcome contextual barriers that impact the likelihood of young people becoming NEET, using psychological knowledge of barriers, support, and transition, in particular, Ryan and Deci's Self-determination Theory, and continuing to raise awareness of those who are at greater risk of becoming NEET, particularly children in care, as some participants overlooked this.

Finally, as well as schools working with the local careers service and EPS, the participants' responses suggest several systemic barriers, suggesting a joined-up approach is needed between the local authority, secondary schools, and post-16 providers. The research also necessitates increased funding from a top-down level for education and travel infrastructure, and an increased focus on contextual barriers to moving into future opportunities in the current governmental guidance.

5.5. Summary of Research Questions

Participants' suggestions of supportive strategies highlight that schools are well-placed to provide preventative support for young people. Within a school ethos that focuses on careers and moving into future opportunities, schools can support young people to feel excited about their futures and aware of the possibilities. They can promote nurturing relationships with students so that young people feel safe to raise concerns and so that staff know their students well enough to identify potential issues. Staff members can work together to offer support and share concerns. Staff members have unique contributions related to their individual roles while also working together and communicating in an ad hoc manner. Schools can also use targeted approaches for young people more vulnerable to becoming NEET and families who may need additional support. A strength of this approach is that schools target young people based on emerging areas of concern, such as those experiencing emotionally based school avoidance, as well as based on potential risk factors. Schools can also use external services such as the local careers service and the EPS to support them in offering targeted support to vulnerable students.

However, as well as suggesting that schools are well placed and able to offer significant reach in supporting students and families, the research also identified several areas of challenge. These challenges included the capacity within schools to provide support due to broader funding issues, a governmental focus on attainment, and an associated narrow and inflexible curriculum. The capacity of services to offer support was also highlighted, echoing broader funding issues in SEND and educational systems. Additionally, participants raised several issues that students face

beyond school, such as travel, the availability of courses, and aspects of the post-school environment.

An exploration of participants' views using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995) identified that participants are aware of the complex interacting factors at proximal and more distal levels, which impact the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET. However, the areas that participants suggested that schools feel the most capacity and responsibility to support young people were within the immediate environment, such as individual factors, support in school, and with the young person's family. There was more variation in the extent to which schools felt able to overcome factors in the wider environment, such as the barriers relating to travel, the availability of courses, and support within the post-school environment. This finding suggests that the role schools are perceived to have in reducing NEET tends to be in two areas. Firstly, a whole school focus on careers, and secondly, offering targeted support for vulnerable students. These roles impact predominantly at the individual level rather than addressing these wider contextual barriers.

An exploration of the findings using Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000) suggested that schools use approaches with students that are both facilitative and inhibitive of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, suggesting potential areas where support could be improved.

I have suggested that the role of EPs in supporting students at risk at NEET is currently best placed to be within the work EPs already offer to schools due to the capacity of the service. This work could involve changing perceptions around NEET, supporting schools to overcome some of these contextual barriers, using their psychological knowledge, including Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory, and raising awareness of need, particularly for children in care.

5.6. Two-page guide

As discussed in the introductory chapter, a key aim within my research was to provide something that could be considered *useful.* I decided to create a two-page guide summarising key learnings from the literature, my research and relevant psychological theory that schools

could use to help them think about how to prevent young people from becoming NEET. The guide includes strategies that the participants identified as effective and reminders to focus on areas sometimes overlooked in interviews.

When considering NEET literature, statistics, and my findings, I felt that it was important to emphasise certain aspects of the literature to help guide how school staff may consider the factors that contribute to becoming NEET and where they can offer support. In particular, I wanted to emphasise the vulnerability of particular groups to becoming NEET as well as the influence of contextual factors, so that school staff might move away from dominant perceptions around aspirations. I incorporated psychological theory (Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model, 1995 and Ryan and Deci's Self Determination Theory) to offer a lens for school staff to use to consider the interacting factors and prompt potential avenues of support.

I also drew upon Implementation Science in the guide, so that school staff had a broad approach to use that was flexible enough to be adapted to different settings and areas. Implementation science is an area of research which is focused on creating effective change within settings (Kelly, 2016). Implementation science recognises that the effectiveness of interventions is impacted by the qualities and practices of organisations and practitioners and that flexibility and responsiveness in approaches are required across different contexts (Kelly, 2016). I have used Meyers et al.'s (2012) four-stage implementation model, which involves initial considerations, creating a plan, ongoing implementation, and reflection. These four stages aim to support preparatory work, gathering necessary resources and staff, evaluation, and continual reflection to improve future approaches.

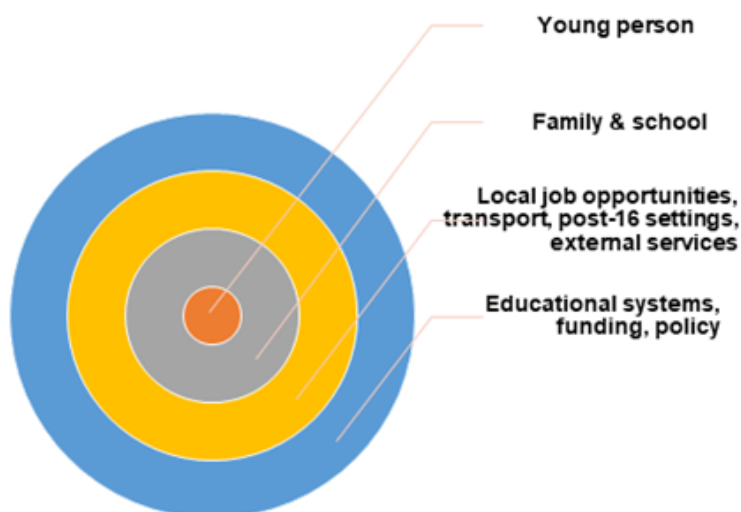## Applying psychology to support young people at risk of becoming NEET: a two-page guide for schools.

Key learnings from the literature:

- NEET refers to 16–24-year-olds who are not in education, employment, or training.
- The likelihood of becoming NEET is not random or equally distributed. Some young people are more likely to become NEET than others, this includes children in care, students with special educational needs and disabilities, low attaining students, and those in receipt of pupil premium.
- Schools can play an important role in preventing young people from becoming NEET.
- It is important to move away assumptions that young people who become NEET are "lacking aspirations", as there are a number of interacting and contextual factors that cause young people to become NEET, these include:
  - Individual and familial factors such as anxiety, independence skills, or changes at home.
  - School based factors such as school experiences, support, careers advice, and friendships.
  - Contextual factors such as travel, the availability of courses, or the post-16 environment.

What psychology is useful in understanding NEET?

Bronfenbrenner's (1995) Bioecological Model can be useful in considering the interacting factors that impact on the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET. A simplified version of his model is shown to the right. The young person is situated in the middle of interacting systems, from more proximal factors such as experiences at home and school, to contextual factors such as transport and more distal influences such as funding and policy.

Young person

Family & school

Local job opportunities, transport, post-16 settings, external services

Educational systems, funding, policy

Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000) suggests people are more likely to achieve their goals if three psychological needs of **autonomy**, **competence**, and **relatedness** are met. Schools can aim to meet these needs to prevent young people becoming NEET:

- ➤ **Autonomy**: *Have their views been considered? Are they being encouraged to pursue a future that is interesting and meaningful to them?*
- ➤ **Competence:** *Are they achieving within school? Would they benefit from more support? Do they understand the steps involved in pursuing their preferred future? Are they confident and able to travel or attend a new setting?*
- ➤ **Relatedness**: *Are there adults in school and at home that they can talk to? Will they need additional support as they transition to a new setting to make friendships?*

How can schools reduce the likelihood of young people becoming NEET?

It can be useful to draw upon implementation science to consider how best to develop a prevention and support strategy within your school. Meyers et al., (2012) offers the following stages:

Initial considerations → Create a plan → Ongoing implementation → Reflection

1. **Initial considerations**
   - Identify at risk students. Consider the characteristics above and local concerns.
   - Identify barriers that students may be experiencing. Consider emotional needs and aspects within the school environment, for instance, the curriculum or current level of support. Also consider local barriers, for instance travel, accessibility of courses, or aspects of the post 16 environment.
   - Consider resources. *Are sufficient resources dedicated to post-16 transition? Careers? Working with vulnerable students and families? Creating a nurturing environment? Is staff recruitment or training necessary? Have relevant links been made with external professionals such as post-16 providers, and local careers services?*

2. **Create a plan**
   - Develop an implementation team. This should be led by a member of the senior leadership team, with the involvement of key staff members such as the career leader, SENDCO, designated teachers, and safeguarding lead.
   - Develop an implementation plan. *How can a whole school ethos be established? How will the plan be disseminated amongst the staffing team? How will at-risk students be identified? How can individual, school-based, and contextual barriers be overcome? Consider working with the local authority and post-16 providers to improve travel links and accessibility of courses. Establish systems to offer targeted support for vulnerable students and families.*

3. **Ongoing implementation**
   - Consider supervision for staff and training.
   - Evaluate progress. *Are more students moving into opportunities that are right for them? Are a greater number of barriers being overcome?*

4. **Reflection**
   - Reflect on the experience to improve future support. *Are there still barriers that young people are experiencing? Could more be done?*

How can Educational Psychologists offer support?

Educational psychologists can work with schools to help them to understand the psychology behind the reasons that young people become NEET, raise awareness of those who are at greater risk, support them to identify barriers, suggest strategies for moving forwards, and support with transition planning. This work could involve consultation, assessment, and gathering of young people's views.

5.7. Contribution to knowledge

A valuable aspect of research is where it makes a useful contribution to knowledge. Yardley (2000) refers to this as the *impact* and *importance* of the research. This research has made several valuable contributions to knowledge. Of most importance is the understanding gained around the views and experiences of SENDCos and career leaders on how schools support pupils at risk of NEET. To my knowledge, this is the first piece of research that has explored this since the current career strategy was introduced in England. The study has gathered valuable insight into the successful strategies used by schools, challenges, and where they feel they have the most capacity and responsibility to offer support. As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, reducing NEET is a social justice issue where schools have a role in providing preventative support. Therefore, the insights gained can help improve practice in this area. The two-page guide offers a usable resource that can be easily shared with schools to improve practice.

In addition to contributing to practice in schools, I have offered suggestions for EPs when working with schools and where their support would be best placed. Previous research into the role of EPs was based on the insights of EPs themselves. In contrast, my conclusions were drawn from direct questions I asked my participants about possible support from EPs, and then expanded upon their responses with my interpretations. Therefore, the implications are influenced by the responses of those using the service, which should mean they are suggestions with real-world relevance.

More broadly, the research has illuminated some of the challenges schools, local authorities, and external services, including EPs, face regarding capacity and funding. Local issues have been highlighted, such as transport links, the capacity of the local careers service, and the availability of EPs. The impact has highlighted the impact of these factors when supporting students at risk of NEET and for schools more broadly. While these findings may be most relevant

to the local authority in which this research was conducted, the broader literature suggests that these challenges also reflect national issues. Therefore, the findings have more general relevance.

The research has also added to the understanding of the concept of NEET. Although a category in itself, the range of topics discussed in the interviews, such as curriculum, attainment, attendance, SEND, wellbeing, resourcing, and transition, suggest that NEET is also related to a number of interrelated topics.

Finally, I have gained personal knowledge and insight from conducting the research that will improve my future practice as an EP. I have delved deeply into the literature on the experiences and support for NEET young people and those at-risk of NEET. This exploration has given me valuable insight, empathy, and understanding, which will support my work in this area. I have also gained an understanding of what it is like for career leaders and SENDCos conducting their work alongside their myriad other responsibilities. I feel these experiences will shape my practice as an EP, not only in the area of NEET but also more broadly in understanding the systems and context within schools.

5.8. Reflexive account

Reflexivity is an essential element of qualitative research and fits my contextualist position and reflexive approach to data analysis (see Methodology Chapter) (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). Reflexivity involves locating yourself within the research and considering how your experiences, personal and professional values, and position in relation to your participants have impacted the conclusions drawn, the decisions made, and data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). I have aimed to be thoughtful and questioning throughout the research. I started by introducing why the research was relevant to me in the Introduction Chapter. I clearly mapped out the rationale for my methodological choices in the Methodology Chapter. I also reflected on my experience as a researcher and positionality and provided an account of the data analysis process. Below I offer some additional reflections on the totality of the research process.

An initial consideration for the research is my dual role as a trainee EP and researcher and how this may have impacted what participants felt comfortable saying. As described in the Methodology Chapter, I used rapport building skills, scripts, and considerations around language and interview structure to make the participants feel comfortable. However, the level of expertise that is sometimes associated with the role of the EP still may have meant that participants felt they needed to answer questions in a certain way to reflect positively on the approaches used within their school. Therefore, this may have prevented participants from being entirely truthful. Despite this, the responses participants gave on the limitations in the support they had received with the EPS, suggests a certain level of ease was felt.

Additionally, the values I hold within my practice may have shaped the research design and interpretations of the data. My practice aligns closely with social justice aims, and I tend to be drawn to the broader, contextual influences in my professional work. These values may have meant that as a researcher my focus was more drawn towards the contextual influences and what schools were doing to overcome these issues than another person conducting the research may have been. These values are likely to have influenced the questions I asked in my topic guide and how I interpreted what the participants said.

Finally, I think it is important to reflect on my decision to allow three participants to participate in one interview, despite my clear rationale for conducting two-person joint interviews outlined in the Methodology Chapter. Although there was useful data gathered through that interview, within the 1-hour timescale, it was more challenging to reach depth across all three of the participants. At a personal level, I am aware that I have a tendency to try to please people, which likely influenced this decision. Permitting an extra person is likely to have allowed them to feel included. However, it may have slightly impacted the quality of the data collected within that interview.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In this final chapter, I offer conclusions on my three research questions and suggest implications for schools, EPs, the local authority, and government. I then explore strengths and limitations of the research and suggest avenues for future research.

6.1. Conclusions on the Research Questions

This research aimed to answer three questions:

- How do career leaders and SENDCos perceive the role schools have in identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET?

- What do career leaders and SENDCos perceive as challenges and successful strategies in this work?

- How can professionals work together to prevent NEET, and how might educational psychologists offer further support in this area?

The responses of the participants suggested that in identifying and supporting those at risk of NEET, schools are perceived to have a role in two key areas: a whole school focus on careers and offering targeted support for those that need additional support. Participants' responses suggest that these roles are supported through six strategies:

1) Providing career guidance and education to raise aspirations and supporting students to make informed choices about their future.

2) Providing students with nurturing relationships so that they feel safe to express worries and adults can identify potential concerns.

3) The contribution of all staff members, from the senior leadership team to staff working directly with young people.

4) Working with vulnerable students who are at greater risk of becoming NEET due to certain characteristics or those that have been identified as at risk within the school support systems.

5) Working with families that may need additional support as their child moves into future education, employment, or training.

6) Receiving support from external professionals to offer guidance and involvement for students of concern that goes beyond what is available in schools.

The approaches outlined by participants can be considered to be influenced in part by the Government's statutory guidance for careers in schools (DfE, 2021a). The approaches can also help to ameliorate some of the systemic inequalities in moving into education, employment, and training which are evident in the NEET statistics (DfE, 2018a). The strategies outlined by participants suggest that schools are well placed and have significant reach in preventing students from becoming NEET, particularly in their ease of access to families, ability to impact at a whole school level and work individually with students. There were some limitations in the perceptions. For instance, there was an emphasis on aspirations and sometimes perceptions of blame, which suggest a focus on within-child narratives. Some participants also underestimated the vulnerability of children in care becoming NEET. Additionally, as is expanded upon below although participants identified a number of contextual barriers that impact on the likelihood of young people becoming NEET, overcoming these barriers was not always focused on in the suggested strategies.

Three areas of challenge in supporting students were identified:

1) The capacity of schools to meet the needs of students

2) The capacity of external services to offer support

3) The barriers experienced beyond school, including travel, accessibility of courses, and the post-16 environment

The challenges raised by participants indicate the broader contextual factors around funding pressures and resourcing that impact schools and the external services that support schools. The findings highlight the broader issues that schools face, as well as how these factors specifically impact the support offered to those at risk of becoming NEET. The issues raised by

participants around travel, the accessibility of courses (especially for those with low attainment and SEND), and a lack of support in post-16 settings identify barriers specific to the local authority, while also echoing issues identified in the broader literature.

An exploration of the findings using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995) suggests that the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET is impacted by interacting factors at multiple levels. These impact more significantly on young people who are already vulnerable. An example of this is that young people with SEND, who are more likely to find travel hardest and benefit most from the continuity of provision in the setting, are the ones who are most likely to need to travel to a new setting for post-16, due to resourcing of local sixth forms.

The participants' responses indicated that they are aware of factors that impact the likelihood of young people becoming NEET at multiple levels. However, the support offered within schools tended to focus on individual factors such as aspirations and support within the immediate environment, such as career advice in school. Overcoming barriers that impacted young people from more distal factors such as travel, the post-16 environment, and school funding appeared to be more challenging. There was significantly more variation in the support offered in these areas. Some participants described approaches that involved being creative with funding and provision for young people, providing travel training, and offering continued support once students had moved to their next settings. However, other responses suggested that these barriers were fixed and difficult to overcome. Overall, participants' responses indicated that they perceive that schools have the most responsibility and capacity to support students to overcome the obstacles at the individual level and within their immediate environment.

An exploration of participants' responses using Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory suggested that schools appear to use approaches that are both facilitative and inhibitive of the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This finding indicates that supporting schools to promote these needs further is a potential avenue of support.

The response to research question 3 indicated a joined-up approach is needed between local authority bodies, schools, colleges, and external services. Specific implications for schools, EPs, the local authority, and the Government are given in the next section.

6.2. Implications

Schools

The participants discussions highlighted the potential reach that schools have in preventing young people from becoming NEET, due to their ease of access to families and understanding of individual students, if these avenues are fully utilised. Several implications are offered directly from participants' response, such as developing a whole school focus on careers and offering targeted support, for students belonging to at-risk groups or who are identified as concerning.

As well as the implications suggested by participants, additional implications have been identified through engagement with wider literature and psychological theory:

- Schools must think beyond aspirations when considering the contributing factors to becoming NEET. Instead, the broader contextual influences that may impact young people should be considered, and steps should be taken to overcome them.

- Although children in care may seem like they are already well supported, statistics place this group as the most at risk of becoming NEET (DfE, 2018a), so the group should remain a priority in NEET prevention strategies in school.

- There is a need to think creatively and early to manage resources in order to support students to overcome barriers relating to accessing the curriculum, travel, transition, and the independence associated with post-16.

- Schools should consider the extent that students are achieving the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (outlined in Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory, 2000).

- Schools can refer to the two-page guide when planning their strategy for preventing students from becoming NEET.

Educational Psychologists

The research has highlighted the stretched capacity of the EPS within the local authority, mirroring similar patterns found elsewhere (Lyonette et al., 2019). This capacity suggests that EPs are currently best placed to offer support in reducing NEET within the work they already provide. This support could involve:

- Changing perceptions: helping school staff to understand the psychological aspects that contribute to young people becoming NEET, including helping to reformulate perceptions around aspirations to focus on the social justice and contextual elements.

- Supporting schools to overcome contextual barriers: advocating for young people during school involvement, reports, and recommendations. This could involve supporting schools to be creative in using resources and approaches to overcome barriers relating to funding, curriculum, travel, and transition.

- Using psychological knowledge of barriers, support, and transition: within consultation practice, assessment, and the gathering of views, EPs can support schools in understanding the psychology behind potential barriers. This could involve using Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000) to help schools consider the extent students are achieving the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

- Raising awareness of need: EPs should be aware of students that are vulnerable to becoming NEET, such as those with SEND, low attainment, pupil premium, children in care, and those that have been excluded or attend an alternative provision. EPs can identify if schools may overlook a vulnerable group such as children in care and actively raise awareness of this group's needs during their involvement with schools.

Local Authorities & Government

This research indicated several barriers within the local authority, around transport links, the accessibility of courses for low attaining pupils and those with SEND, and the post-16 environment. Literature suggests that similar challenges are present elsewhere. These findings indicate that a joined-up approach is needed, where schools, post-16 providers and local authority bodies meet to discuss these challenges and consider creative ways to overcome them. The participants' comments about the reduction in the capacity of the local career service within this local authority also offer implications around resourcing for this service, specifically around the importance of practitioners attending annual reviews for students with EHCPs that are at-risk of NEET and widening their referral criteria.

The research also necessitates increased funding from a top-down level for education and travel infrastructure. Additionally, a focus on the contextual barriers that young people experience when moving into future opportunities could be highlighted in the current statutory guidance for careers in schools (DfE, 2021a) to bring this to the forefront of attention for those implementing the policy.

6.3. Strengths & Limitations of the Study

A strength of the research was the use of joint interviews. Joint interviews are a neglected form of interviewing in qualitative research (Cartwright et al., 2016). However, the approach was well suited to my research and has much potential as a data collection tool. Within the interviews, participants indicated many examples of co-construction, where they added, expanded, and followed on from the views and examples of the other. This co-construction meant that my data was detailed and based on the combined view of staff members with different angles and areas of expertise, rather than informed by the insight of one. For instance, the career leaders often described whole-school approaches that they used to deliver career education and guidance. SENDCos would often follow up on these examples by explaining how they tailored this work to meet the needs of vulnerable students and families requiring additional support.

I also feel that the joint interview approach had benefits for participants. Through the process of co-construction, participants gained a deeper awareness and understanding of the work their colleagues were doing. For instance, participants often reflected on how nice it was to spend time with each other and hear more about the other's work. It is possible that this sharing of practice will have had a positive impact on joined-up approaches moving forwards. I also noticed that participants often pointed out positives in their colleague's work, suggesting occasions where they had gone the extra mile or personal attributes. These positive affirmations likely had individual benefits for the participants. Additionally, it meant that examples of effective work were shared that may not have been raised if I had only interviewed one participant.

As well as the benefits of the joint interview approach, participants often reflected on and appeared to find release in expressing difficulties and recognising the work they had been doing, suggesting that the research offered validation and catharsis for participants.

Additionally, as suggested in the literature (Thunberg & Arnell, 2021; Alkhateeb, 2018), the video conferencing approach was convenient for participants. A commonality in the school staff I spoke to during the recruitment process was how stretched they were for time. Using a video conferencing approach meant that participants could easily participate in between other activities, likely increasing the number of participants that took part and reducing stress levels for those that did. There were some minor connectivity issues, but thankfully these did not impact too greatly on the research overall.

Finally, the generalisability of the research is relevant. The concept of generalisation is often discussed in relation to quantitative research to indicate that the findings can be applied to a wider population or different contexts (Smith, 2018). However, in qualitative research, generalisation is often only discussed to highlight a weakness of the research (Smith, 2018), which misses the aim of qualitative paradigms. For instance, the aim of my research was not to unearth representational truths. Instead, it was to explore my participants' experiences, find out what they feel works, is helpful, and identify potential barriers. The findings were always going to

represent the views of who I asked and be influenced by their individual contexts, school environment, and local authority. Smith (2018) argues that generalisability is important in qualitative research but needs to be approached in a different way to quantitative that is coherent with the aims of qualitative research. Drawing on the work of other authors, he proposes four types of generalisability relevant to qualitative research. In terms of my research, two of these feel particularly applicable.

Firstly, Smith describes transferability, the extent that findings are transferable to other settings. My research has relevance beyond the samples that I asked. Secondary school staff may read the research and have valuable implications and considerations for their practice. Schools can use the two-page guide to consider their approaches and improve practice in their schools. The guide's strength is that it is based on implementation science and therefore offers a suitably flexible approach that school staff in different contexts can use within their school. The application of the results to theory may also be relevant to school staff. They can consider which areas of Bronfenbrenner's model (1995) their support prioritises or the extent their approaches promote the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, EPs may read the findings and consider whether the barriers and successful strategies are relevant to the schools and local authorities they work with within.

The second type of generalisability discussed in Smith's paper (2018) that feels relevant to my research is analytic generalisability. This form occurs when the researcher generalises their results to an established theory or concept. In my study, I indicated the utility of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1995) to understanding the interacting influences that impact on the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. I also highlighted the relevance of Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory in considering relevant barriers and supportive strategies for NEET or at-risk of NEET young people.

There were also some limitations of the research. As described in the Methodology Chapter an early consideration in my research was which school staff to interview. During the

recruitment process, some participants felt that they were not the best person to talk to and recommended that I speak to school mentors or staff delivering career guidance. These responses highlight that reducing NEET is something that many different school staff have potential roles in. An alternative approach to recruitment could have been to invite anyone working within the school that felt their role was involved in reducing the likelihood of students becoming NEET. Such an approach would have given an insight into which school staff are involved and may have led to different responses to the research questions. However, such an approach could also have led to data that was disparate and difficult to group together into themes. Additionally, it is important to note that those participants who had suggested that I speak to an alternative staff member always made valuable comments in their interviews. Thus, despite feeling that they were not the best person to participate, they still had relevant insight.

Similarly to the above point, I chose to only speak to school staff, but a number of professionals working outside of schools, such as practitioners from the local career service, education welfare officers, post-16 providers, and local authority professionals, could have been useful to gain a broader understanding of the topic. Furthermore, the views of EPs could have been gathered to gain a more up-to-date understanding of how they perceive their role or potential role in NEET.

Additionally, most of the schools that took part appeared proud of their approaches to reducing NEET and delivering career guidance and education. For instance, most schools described having a low or zero NEET rate most years. Therefore, my results may indicate the approaches used by schools that have made a significant investment in this type of work rather than representing a more balanced perspective.

A further limitation of the research is that the views of young people who were NEET or at risk of NEET were not gathered. Gathering the views of children and young people around their support and decisions that impact them is outlined in both international legislation (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) and UK educational policy (SEND Code of Practice,

DfE, 2015). It has also been suggested that EPs are well placed to gather and communicate views (Ingram, 2013). Gathering the views of young people on the support they received in school could have shed valuable light on what helped and hindered their move into future education, employment and training. Although there has been previous research on this topic, to my knowledge there has not been any since the current careers strategy in the UK was outlined (DfE, 2021). Gathering the views of young people is an integral part of the values I use in my practice as a trainee EP. Conducting research with young people had always been an area of interest in my thesis, even before I had decided on the topic. However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place at the time of seeking ethical approval, no face-to-face research was permitted. It felt ethically challenging for me to gather the views of potentially vulnerable young people, virtually.

It is also crucial to point out that my research was based on the views of staff working in mainstream schools only, and therefore does not reflect the views of staff working in specialist and alternative provisions. The views of staff working in these other settings could be valuable as statistics suggest that young people who attend alternative provisions, have SEND, or have been excluded are at increased risk of becoming NEET.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the potential limitations caused by the context my research was conducted within. As a rural county, travel was a key concern, so this was reflected in participants' responses. In a less rural location, travel may not be so great an issue. Additionally, the EPS has a substantial backlog of statutory assessments for potential EHCPs, so it is possible that this impacted participants' responses around the capacity of the EPS and the limited involvement outside of statutory work. It is possible that in a local authority with no backlog, the EPS may have a more direct contribution to reducing and preventing NEET.

6.4. Future research

With the limitations discussed in the previous section in mind, there are a number of possible areas for future research:

- Gathering the views of young people who have experienced a period of time NEET, or who were considered at risk of NEET on their perceptions and experiences of supporting moving into future education, employment, and training in school. Research in this area could build on previous studies by providing a more up-to-date account of young people's experiences since the new career strategy was implemented.

- Similarly, a more up-to-date account of the perceptions of EPs on their role could be gathered. This could draw on a representative sample by using an approach such as a survey that could be sent out nationally. Therefore, capturing the views of EPs who may have had more direct involvement in NEET.

- A study could explore the perceptions of professionals in alternative and special educational provisions on the strategies and barriers

- Additionally, drawing on the benefits of co-construction evident in my joint interview approach, it could be useful to hold focus groups of participants from a range of professions involved in reducing NEET. These focus groups could include a greater range of school staff, including staff in delivery roles and members of the senior leadership team, EPs, career services, education welfare officers, post-16 providers, and local authority staff. The goal of the research could be to explore what currently works and establish ways of moving forward.

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Chapter 8. Appendices

Appendix A. PRISMA Flow Diagram for Systematic Reviews

Identification of studies via databases and registers

Identification

Records identified from:
Web of Science (n=122)
PsychInfo (n =28)
EBSCO host* (n = 54)
Ethos (n=3)
Snowballing (n=5)

212 (total)

Duplicate records removed
(n = 41)

Screening

Records screened
(n = 171)

Records excluded
(n = 107)

Reports sought for retrieval
(n = 64)

Reports not retrieved
(n = 0)

Reports assessed for eligibility
(n = 64)

Reports excluded:30
(reasons given in Appendix B)

Included

Studies included in review
(n = 34)

*Including British Education Index, ERIC, Child Development & Adolescent Studies

Appendix B. Excluded papers with reasons.

Reference	Reason for exclusion
Acquah, D. K., & Huddleston, P. (2014). Challenges and Opportunities for Vocational Education and Training in the Light of Raising the Participation Age. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 19*(1), 1-17.	Critique and analysis of policy and trends rather than empirical research.
Demack, S., McCaig, C., Wolstenholme, C., Stevens, A., Fumagalli, L., Education Endowment, F., & Sheffield Hallam University, S. I. o. E. (2016). ThinkForward: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary. In: Education Endowment Foundation.	Excluded as quantitative not qualitative data.
Cornish, C. Exclusion by design: uncovering systems of segregation and 'ghettoization' of so-called NEET and 'disengaged' youth on an employability course in a further education (FE) college. *Journal of Youth Studies*.	Same piece of research as Cornish (2018) which I have included in the review.
Cornish, C. (2017). Case study: level 1 Skills to Succeed (S2S) students and the gatekeeping function of GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) at an FE college. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 22*(1), 7-21.	Same piece of research as Cornish (2018) which I have included in the review.
Cornish, C. (2021). The paradox of BKSB assessments and functional skills: the experiences of 'disengaged' youth on an employability course in a further education college. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 45*(10), 1411-1423.	Same piece of research as Cornish (2018) which I have included in the review.
Danner, M., Guegnard, C., & Maguire, S. (2021). Understanding economic inactivity and NEET status among young women in the UK and France. *Journal of Education and Work, 34*(7-8), 839-854.	Was not an original piece of research – reported on research already included in the current literature review (Maguire, 2018)
Davies, J., McKenna, M., Bayley, J., Denner, K., & Young, H. (2020). Using engagement in sustainable construction to improve mental health and social connection in disadvantaged and hard to reach groups: a new green care approach. *Journal of Mental Health, 29*(3), 350-357.	Research was conducted with NEETs and adult asylum seekers. Due to the reporting, it was difficult to disentangle the effects for the NEET group from the effects for the asylum seekers, so it was decided to not include this study.
Erdogan, E., Flynn, P., Nasya, B., Paabort, H., & Lendzhova, V. (2021). NEET Rural-Urban Ecosystems: The Role of Urban Social Innovation Diffusion in Supporting Sustainable Rural Pathways to Education, Employment, and Training. *Sustainability, 13*(21).	Review focused on 27 European countries, which could potentially skew the literature review due to the different policies and practices used within the countries.
Furlong, A. (2006). Not a very NEET solution: representing problematic labour market transitions among early school-leavers. *Work Employment and Society, 20*(3), 553-569.	Reflecting on data from the Scottish Leavers Survey rather than empirical, original research.

Heyman, A., & Heyman, B. (2013). 'The sooner you can change their life course the better': the time-framing of risks in relationship to being a young carer. *Health Risk & Society, 15*(6-7), 561-579	Excluded on the basis of focusing on caring responsibilities and perceptions, rather than the topic of NEET a focal point.
Maguire, S. (2008). Paying Young People to Learn--Does It Work? *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 13*(2), 205-215.	Reflecting on evaluation data collected in 1999 (pre-2002), also not original research as used data from other pieces of research.
McCrystal, P., Percy, A., & Higgins, K. (2007). *School exclusion drug use and antisocial behaviour at 15/16 years: Implications for youth transitions. [References]*: Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies. Vol.2(3), 2007, pp. 181-190.	Focused on secondary school-based exclusions rather than NEET.
McMurray, S. (2019). The impact of funding cuts to further education colleges in Scotland. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 43*(2), 201-219.	Opinion/ critical analysis of policy rather than empirical evidence.
Nelson, P., & Taberrer, S. (2017). *Hard to reach and easy to ignore: The drinking careers of young people not in education, employment or training. [References]*: Child & Family Social Work. Vol.22(1), 2017, pp. 428-439.	Focus was on drinking rather than education, employment, or training.
Rodeiro, C. V., & Williamson, J. (2019). Meaningful destinations: using national data to investigate how different education pathways support young people's progression in England. *Research Papers in Education, 34*(6), 725-748	Excluded as quantitative not qualitative data.
Russell, L. (2013). Researching Marginalised Young People. *Ethnography and Education, 8*(1), 46-60.	Reflecting on research methodology rather than an original piece of research.
Russell, L., Simmons, R., & Thompson, R. (2011). Ordinary Lives: An Ethnographic Study of Young People Attending Entry to Employment Programmes. *Journal of Education and Work, 24*(5), 477-499	Part of a set of papers, totality of research is summarised in Simmons & Thompson 2011 which in included in the review.
Russell, L., Simmons, R., & Thompson, R. (2011). Conceptualising the Lives of NEET Young People: Structuration Theory and "Disengagement". *Education, Knowledge & Economy: A Journal for Education and Social Enterprise, 5*(3), 89-106.	Reflects on first year of ethnographic study, full paper of full 3 years (Simmons et al., 2014) is included in the review.
Seddon, F., Hazenberg, R., & Denny, S. (2013). Effects of an employment enhancement programme on participant NEETs. *Journal of Youth Studies, 16*(4), 503-520.	Reporting on research already included in the review (Hazenberg et al., (2014).
Selenko, E., & Pils, K. (2019). The after-effects of youth unemployment: More vulnerable persons are less likely to succeed in Youth Guarantee programmes. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 40*(2), 282-300.	Analysed archival data from Austria so not UK based.
Simmons, R. (2017). Employability, knowledge and the creative arts: reflections from an ethnographic study of NEET young people on an entry to employment programme. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 22*(1), 22-37.	Reflecting on research already included in the review (Russell et al., 2011)
Simmons, R., & Smyth, J. (2016). Crisis of Youth or Youth in Crisis? Education, Employment and Legitimation Crisis. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 35*(2), 136-152.	Not an empirical research study, a critique or analysis instead using on research already included in the review (Russell et al., 2011)

Stain, H. J., Baker, A. L., Jackson, C., Lenroot, R., Paulik, G., Attia, J., Hides, L. (2019). Study protocol: a randomised controlled trial of a telephone delivered social wellbeing and engaged living (SWEL) psychological intervention for disengaged youth. *Bmc Psychiatry, 19*	Conducted in Australia not the UK.
Thompson, R. (2010). Teaching on the Margins: Tutors, Discourse and Pedagogy in Work-Based Learning for Young People. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 62*(2), 123-137.	Reflects on first year of ethnographic study (Simmons et al., 2014) which is included in the review.
Thompson, R. (2011). Individualisation and Social Exclusion: The Case of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. *Oxford Review of Education, 37*(6), 785-802.	It is a commentary/ analysis on the topic of NEET rather than empirical evidence.
Thompson, R. (2011). Reclaiming the Disengaged? A Bourdieuian Analysis of Work-Based Learning for Young People in England. Critical Studies in Education, 52(1), 15-28.	Reflecting on research already included in the review (Simmons & Thompson, 2011)
Thompson, R. (2017). Opportunity structures and educational marginality: the post-16 transitions of young people outside education and employment. *Oxford Review of Education, 43*(6), 749-766.	Reflecting on research already included in the review (Simmons & Thompson, 2011)
Thompson, R., Russell, L., & Simmons, R. (2014). Space, place and social exclusion: an ethnographic study of young people outside education and employment. Journal of Youth Studies, 17(1), 63-78.	Reflecting on 2nd year of longer ethnographic study that is included in review (Simmons et al., 2014)
Thornham, H. (2014). Claiming 'creativity': discourse, 'doctrine' or participatory practice? *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 20*(5), 536-552.	Focus was on creativity rather than education, employment or training.
Yates, S., & Payne, M. (2006). Not so NEET? A critique of the use of 'NEET'in setting targets for interventions with young people. *Journal of youth studies*, *9*(3), 329-344.	Not original piece of research, commentary on Hoggarth & Smith (2004) which is included in review.

Appendix C. All papers included in the review

The below table details all the studies included within the review, including critiques based on the CASP Qualitative Checklist

(CASP, 2018). An example of the checklist is provided after the table.

Reference	Research Aim	Participants	Design	Analytic Approach	Themes & findings	Critique
Arnold & Baker (2013)	Two-part research: 1.To identify risk factors for young people becoming NEET. 2.To explore the experiences of being NEET and expand upon the realities of the identified risk factors.	1. 260 young people 2. 9 young people	1.Action research using local authority data to develop a screening tool. 2.Case study exploring young peoples' experiences of being NEET and the presence of the risk factors identified in the initial research.	1. statistical analysis 2. Phenomenological method	1.Found that 50% of young people that become NEET could be identified at 14, which the author's suggested allows for early intervention. The relationships between professionals and young people were found to act as a protective factor. Young people who had negative educational experiences and low academic attainment were more likely to become NEET. 2.The risk factors identified in the initial research were present in the experiences of the case study participants. Young	1. The study raises ethical concerns for screening young people. However, the authors acknowledge this indicating the researchers critically reflected and engaged ethically. The study provides a useful strategy to identify those in need of early intervention, so the study has useful real-world impact and importance. 2.The follow up study builds upon the themes highlighted in the initial study, adding a richer, contextualised

					people's experiences highlighted themes of complexity, instability, social exclusion, and low confidence, and the importance of relationships and early identification.	account. A strength of the paper is the authors reflection on recruitment and consideration of strengths and limitations of the participant population.
Avila & Rose (2019)	To explore the views and impact of professionals working with NEET individuals.	25 professionals working with NEET young people (including tutors, admin staff, career advisors and those in managerial roles).	Mixed methods, involving an web survey and 6 semi-structured interviews.	Statistical analysis of survey data and Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis of interview data.	The quantitative and qualitative findings suggested that the professionals held limiting assumptions about the NEET young people and what they were capable of. Professionals were found to move between individual and contextual perceptions of the causes of the young people's NEET status. The study proposed that professionals reconcile this by offering a nurturing and safe place for NEETs.	The author's clearly articulated their aims and reasons for the methodologically approaches, seeking to uncover depth of understanding through the qualitative phase to triangulate with the quantitative results. The findings and analysis were clearly represented, allowing for transparency.
Beck (2015).	To explore how learning providers support agency	13 professionals in 11 different	Semi-structured interviews	Narrative analysis	Providers were found to support young people's self-esteem	No description of approach to data analysis which

					and motivation but also tended to have low aspirations for the young people and discussed the constraints of the labour market openly with young people. The author felt these views could become an additional barrier for young people. The authors argued these outlooks are related to the practitioner's own experience of low skill level and pay.	raises questions around validity and bias.
development for NEET young people.	learning providers for previously NEET young people.					
Brown (2021)	To explore current practice of professionals supporting young people who are at risk of becoming NEET in four local authorities in Wales.	NEET Leads, Education Welfare Officers and secondary school staff (total n=10)	semi-structured interviews	Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis	The study found a number of positive outcomes of the current support, as well barriers. It was suggested the EP could offer individual, group and systemic support.	The research provides useful implications for the experiences of young people in Wales, however this is less relevant to the current research which is based in England.
Buchanan & Tuckerman (2016)	To explore information need behaviours, and social integration for NEET young people.	NEET young people (aged 16-19) and their support workers. Located in a deprived	Observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with young people &	Thematic Analysis Braun & Clarke	Young people were found to have the largest information need for employment, then education and training.	The researchers took the time to familiarise themselves with the participants and their culture first through

		areas of South Ayrshire.	support workers.		Participants also had information needs around money, health, and accommodation. NEET young people were reliant on support workers to help them online, displaying low information literacy and self-efficacy and presenting as confused, frustrated, and with low tolerance to challenge.	observation, and offered reflections on their positionality as researchers. Indicating they considered the relationship between researcher and participants well. However, the study primarily focused on their access to IT rather than NEET experiences as a whole, so the contribution of the study to the NEET literature in general is limited.
Cajic-Seigneur & Hodgson (2016).	To exploring the effectiveness of an alternative education provision (AEP) for pupils who were disengaged from mainstream education.	Year 11 students attending an alternative educational provision in London in an area of high NEET rates. All students had been excluded or	7 year, case study approach, involving analysis of programme records, semi-structured interviews with students and staff, and student questionnaire.	Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems used for analysis, no description of approach.	The study found that the academic achievement in the provision was higher than national averages, although the retention was lower than in mainstream schools. 80 per cent of students enrolled on further education courses post-16, but	There was limited analysis of the validity of the findings in relation to supporting those at-risk of NEET. For instance, only 80% of young people went on to post 16 and many dropped out, which raises questions about

					then 10% dropped out by January. Pupils described that they preferred the AEP to their previous mainstream schools, for several reasons, including "being treated like an adult", their relationships with teachers, the small class sizes and studying vocational courses with relevance for post-16.	the efficacy of the programme and, therefore, the relevance of the conclusions drawn.
Cornish (2018).	To explore the effects of raising the participation age for previously NEET or at risk of NEET young people on a Level 1 prevocational course.	Further education college in Southeast England. 7 tutors and 26 students.	Case study approach using observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups.	Did not describe.	Author's described "warehousing" where the focus was on keeping young people busy rather than teaching them skills. The authors wrote that this resulted in disruptive behaviour from young people. Students were blocked from taking academic routes such as GCSEs even when they expressed a desire to do so.	The study did not report on the approach to data analysis which raises questions around validity and bias.
Currie & Goodall, (2009).	To explore ways to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET	34 young people who had previously attended 4	Questionnaires to staff and young people.	Exploration of common themes.	The authors' found that school staff did not identify clear patterns to young	There was a lack of reflection on the participants and recruitment. For

were at risk of exclusion.

	and what they viewed as supportive in their post-16 transition.	different secondary schools in 4 LAs in Scotland.			people becoming NEET. Young people identified positive relationships, careers services and work experience as facilitative factors. Authors suggested that EPs could have a role in supporting collaborative working with schools, careers services, and post-16 providers.	instance, young people were accessing careers services, so they were unlikely to be the most vulnerable. No formal analysis was conducted which could have missed out important themes and meant there was a lack of transparency. Found that not all young people could remember what had been useful to them, so the findings may not have been accurate.
Denton-Calabrese et al., (2021).	To explore the impact of a multidisciplinary computing program for NEET young women.	9 NEET young women aged 16–21.	Semi-structured interviews conducted at multiple stages of the program.	Qualitative content analysis.	Found the participants self-concepts for education, future work ambitions, and technology improved during the program. 100% of participants who finished the program moved into opportunities. Holistic approaches, that were tailored to the	A strength is that the authors used a rigorous and transparent data analysis procedure.

The study focused on participants who completed the programme, so it may not represent |

					individual, within an informal environment was identified as effective.	the views of those most in need of support, limiting the potential impact of the study. However, the authors did reflect on this in the paper, indicating reflexivity.
Duffy, & Elwood, (2013).	To explore the motivators and barriers within school for young people identified as at-risk of NEET.	107 participants, from 18 different schools.	15 focus groups.	Qualitative data analysis package (NVivo 8).	The authors suggested that disengagement is not a fixed state. The participants discussed facilitative factors in their engagement and learning, including teacher and peer relationships, the quality of the teaching, and positive staff views on vocational subjects. Barriers included pupil-teacher relationships, feeling labelled, feeling like they did not belong and disruptive pupils.	A strength of this study was the nuanced and changeable account it gave of young people presenting as disengaged. Clear findings were made of inhibitive and facilitative factors. The paper used a transparent method of reporting their data analysis, highlighting a further strength.
Finlay et al., (2010).	To explore the lives of young people classed as NEET.	26 Scottish young people classed as NEET.	Creative approaches (drama, video	Narrative analysis	Young people had a range of experiences (drug use, young parents, school	The was considerable thought and reflection on the

					exclusion). Many described negative school experiences. Young people were found to have "typical" aspirations.	use of creative approaches. These approaches will likely have yielded more in-depth accounts that approaches such as questionnaires. An additional strength was the reflections on the relationship between researcher and participants.
Gabriel (2015)	To explore young people's experiences of being NEET, being in EET and the potential role of EPs.	9 young people (17-21 years) & 4 adult with roles relating to NEET	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis for the young people's interviews. A lighter touch approach to the stakeholder interviews.	Being NEET was found to be a negative experience for all young people. Findings suggest that better support from significant others and tailored options and choice for post-16 destinations would benefit young people. Implications for EPs to support schools systemically, to create better links with post-16 providers, and career agencies and to elevate young people's voices.	The study used psychological theory (self-determination theory) to help understand the young people's experiences, which led to useful implications for professionals and contributed to knowledge around the applicability of model in general. By focusing on young people who were now EET, the research may

						have missed views of the most vulnerable young people.
Hanrahan et al., (2020)	To explore the trajectories of those in care who have experienced 'educational success'.	Care experienced young people (aged 16–32)	Qualitative longitudinal research over one year involving interviews & creative methods.	Case by case based qualitative analysis.	Participants views suggested the value of therapeutic and educational support. They noted the benefit of support that came from key adults, and the need for flexible pathways.	The paper took a carefully considered and sensitive approach to data collection, indicating consideration around ethics and researcher reflexivity.
Hazenberg et al., (2014).	To compare the impact of a social enterprise and a 'for-profit' organisation working with NEETs.	82 NEET young people participated at (time 1). 43 of which participated at time 2 due to drop out. 10 staff members also took part.	Participants completed self-efficacy questionnaires pre and post completion of the programme. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with staff members were also conducted.	Quantitative analysis of questionnaires & inductive qualitative analysis of interviews.	No significant difference was found in terms of the outcomes from each programme. However, the discussions suggested the social enterprise had a more flexible programme and took on young people with greater levels of need.	The contribution of the findings to the literature on NEET as a whole is limited as the research focuses primarily on a comparison between the two types of organisations, rather than the participants experiences. However, it offered some relevant implications on what is helpful within organisations (for instance flexibility).

Hoggarth, & Smith, (2004).	To explore the benefits and limitations of the Connexions Service for young people at risk of NEET.	855 young people in priority groups (aged 13-19) and 444 Connexions staff across 7 local authorities.	Semi-structured interviews.	Realistic evaluation drawing on theories of change.	Relationships with staff was found to be an important aspect for young people. Support was found to be most effective when it was holistic and focused on a range of both hard outcomes, such as post-16 opportunities and soft ones, such as personal growth). The approach was most effective when there was a joined-up approach with schools. It was found that there was not always effective assessment of risk or prioritising those most in need. Barriers were identified around capacity and sometimes an overly rigid focus on the NEET target and pressure on young people to attend a sometimes-unsuitable EET option.	This research likely offered valuable impact at the time, as is a large scale qualitative evaluation. However, the usefulness of the findings today are questionable as it draws on a government funded programme that no longer exists.
Lawy, & Wheeler. (2013).	To explore the experiences of long term	Unemployed 18-24 years olds from	Semi-structured interviews	A Bourdieusian framework	The authors found that young people's access to resources at a	A strength of the research was the consideration

	unemployed young people.	middle class backgrounds.			financial, social and cultural level impacted their aspirations and achievements.	around participants. The authors clearly stated why they had chosen to focus on middle class NEET young people. This was a novel approach and therefore contributed to the literature. However, the small sample size makes it difficult to draw conclusions and there is limited reflection on this.
Lorinc, et al., (2020).	To explore the processes and factors that lead to young people becoming NEET.	53 NEET young people in high NEET rate area of London.	Longitudinal study of school & transition experiences (semi-structured interviews & focus groups)	NVivo thematic analysis and narrative approaches. Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory.	A number of factors were identified to lead to educational disengagement and later becoming NEET. These included a lack of support in school, receiving limited careers guidance, and broader social and economic disadvantage. Participants appeared to locate the issues within personal factors rather than the structural barriers,	There were several limitations. The authors could have been more transparent around the ethical decisions in the research and reflected more greatly on their roles as researchers. A strength was the application of psychological theory to their research findings,

						which clearly highlighted the structural barriers that contribute to becoming NEET.
					indicating a process of internalisation.	
Maguire (2018)	To explore the experiences of economically inactive young women.	Young women aged 16–25 (N=57).	Exploration of data provided in the Labour Force Survey and in-depth interviews.	Not disclosed.	The research found that the women had experienced a range of life events and circumstances such as parenthood, caring for other family members, and mental or physical health needs. Participants were often isolated, had low self-esteem, and were lacking support, intervention, access to childcare and employment. Most had qualifications. Overall suggests structural barriers to employment.	The study used a large sample size, with similar patterns found across 9 different geographical locations, indicating a level representativeness of the findings.

However, the study did not report on the approach to data analysis, which raises questions around validity and bias. |
| Miller, et al. (2015). | To explore how youth groups generate social capital in young NEET people. | 24 NEET young people across 2 youth group sites in Scotland. | The young people were interviewed at the beginning and end of the project. | Thematic analysis. | Young people discussed feelings of negativity directed from the community, which impacted on them emotionally and led to isolation. The youth work projects helped diminish these | The paper clearly discussed reasons for data collection approaches, indicating transparency and reflexivity. Young people's views were gathered |

					feeling through helping young people to feel empowered through development of new skills and relationships with staff and members of the community.	over time so the authors were able to notice changes and explore factors that led to these change, adding to the validity and impact of the findings.
Pemberton, (2008).	To explored factors that contribute to becoming NEET.	21 NEET young people.

10 practitioners, including youth and social workers | Semi-structured interviews | Thematic analysis. | The study found intergenerational and situational contributing factors, such as a lack of support from peers and family, low educational attainment, poor experiences within the workplace and limited opportunities locally for further study, training, or work. | The authors triangulated NEET young people's views with the views of practitioners, adding to the validity of the findings. |
| Phillips, (2010). | To explore the impact of the Connexions programme for young people. | 21 young people accessing Connexions to support with finding education, employment or training. | 2-year ethnographic research in 3 centres involving semi-structured interviews on 1-3 occasions. | Thematic analysis | The study found that relationships with peers, family, and staff were important aspects of change for young people. The young people also used some of their own resources and personal resilience to overcome obstacles. | A strength of the study is the use of peer researchers to inform the design. The researchers reflected on their biases and positionality within the paper. Additionally, the 2-year time frame indicates |

						commitment to the data collection. However, there was no description of the approach to data analysis, meaning the results lack transparency.
Riaz (2018).	To explore the aspirations of black and minority ethnic (BME) Muslim young people identified as at-risk of becoming NEET post-16.	11 BME Muslim young people in Glasgow in Year 11 or recently finished schooling, identified as at risk of becoming NEET.	Semi-structured paired interviews	Thematic analysis (using line-by-line coding).	5 of the 11 participants relayed that they had been treated differently in school. They described that they had felt overlooked and discriminated against by teachers and unsupported with their studies and transition. However, others felt they had been helped by school staff with their learning and transition and did not relay discriminatory experiences.	A strength of this study is that it is raised the voices of a sometimes marginalised group of young people. A limitation is there was no explicit reference to how themes were created, so the study lacks transparency and reflexivity.
Robertson (2018).	To explore the experiences of young people attending a 12-week Princes Trust programme.	14 NEET young people	Semi-structured interviews	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	The participants were found to have positive experiences of the programme and often relayed feeling more confident. Different aspects of the	There was limited reflection on the validity of the findings. For instance, young people that agreed to interview were

					experience were valued by the young people, such as areas of learning, increased confidence, new relationships, and identifying new goals. No unique aspect, rather the combination of a safe space that boosted their confidence and encouraged them to form new skills and ideas were beneficial.	more likely to give positive reflections on the programme, which may have skewed the findings.
Rose et al., (2012).	To investigate what being included meant to NEET young people.	11 NEET participants	Semi-structured interviews	Braun & Clarke Thematic Analysis	The research found that feeling "included" meant feeling accepted within friendships, family networks, and organisations. Participants discussed social pressures that influenced their feelings of inclusion, such as pressures to go to university, and prioritise education and work.	A strength of this research was an advisory group of currently and previously NEET young people supported with the design of the study, indicating researchers reflected on their biases and positionality.
Ryan et al., (2019).	To explore the factors that helped and hindered young people's	Survey of 3018 Year 10 and Year 12 students	Survey to gather young people's school	Statistical analysis of quantitative data, narrative analysis and then thematic analysis using	The strongest correlation was found between school engagement and	The sequential design of the study allowed the quantitative survey

	engagement with schooling.	across areas of high NEET rates in Greater London and the Northeast of England. A subsample of 10 participated in qualitative interviews.	engagement and their perceptions of support, followed by semi-structured interviews with a subsample to elicit specific examples.	NVivo10 for qualitative interviews.	perceptions of teacher support, this was followed by perceptions of parental support, then peer support. These findings were supported and expanded upon by the qualitative interviews.	to identify important factors related to young people's engagement with school. It was then possible to explore these using specific examples in the qualitative phase, which gave a deeper understanding of these support systems.
Simmons et al., (2014).	To explore the labour market experiences of young people currently NEET.	26 NEET young people in total (6 ceased participation early).	Longitudinal ethnography involving participant observation in the community and at home, semi-structured interviews, life-history maps, and photo elicitation.	Not described	The study found a lack of job and education opportunities for low to middle attaining young people. Young people had typical aspirations; however, their lack of opportunities affected their agency and belief in what was possible. The study found that young people all experienced some form of social or economic disadvantage (e.g., low attainment, parental unemployment, school	The researchers reflected deeply on ethics and gaining information in a way that was participant-led. Additionally, as it was conducted over time it provided insights from young people coming in and out of education/ work. An ethnographic approach was used which has strengths and limitations. A strength is that this study contributes a

					exclusion), suggesting the contribution of this to becoming NEET.	deep insight into the lives of the young people studied, contextualising them within one particular location. However, ethnography is also heavily reliant on the involvement and influence of the researcher and their subjective views. This study lacked a clear description of the data analysis approach and how finding were drawn, which raises questions about the validity of the findings.
Simmons, & Thompson (2011).	To explore young people's experiences of an entry to employment initiative.	Young people enrolled on an entry to employment initiative who would otherwise be	3 year longitudinal ethnographic study involving observation and interviews with young	Not described.	Found practitioners were motivated to teach and offer relational support, but their capacity to do this was often confined within the	Similarly to the above ethnographic study, there was a lack of description of the data analysis.

		NEET in northern England.	people and practitioners at 4 learning provisions.		social context within which the course operated. The course was regarded with low status, the building was in a segregated location, young people were often viewed as non-academic, and teachers had low pay and status.	Additionally, as the research was collected in 2007-2008 much may have changed in these educational opportunities since then, raising questions of the importance of the research today.
Simmons, et al., (2020).	To used the work of Bourdieu to understand the lives of a group of NEET men.	13 NEET men living in a deprived estate in a north England town.	Ethnography, involving participant observation in the community, and semi-structured interviews.	Interview transcripts & field notes were examined systematically using Bourdieu's conceptual framework.	The findings indicated the heterogeneity of the NEET category. Participants were found to have conventional ambitions and had often previously been in work or training. Individuals appeared discouraged and impacted by their negative experiences. The opportunities were further impacted by structural forces such as availability of opportunities and deprivation.	The researchers reflected deeply on ethics and gaining information in a way that was participant-led. Additionally, as it was conducted over time it provided insights from young people coming in and out of education/ work. Similarly to the previous ethnographic studies, this research provided a detailed insight into the lives of the young people studied, contextualising

						them within one particular location. However, there was insufficient transparency and reflection on how the data was analysed and conclusions drawn.
Smith, & Wright (2015).	To explore literacy education for NEET young people	13 staff members on relevant courses.	semi-structured interviews.	Not described	Teachers described a low level of engagement from students which were thought to be related to the use of technical approaches to teaching literacy that focused on aspects such as grammar. Existing funding, assessment approaches, and traditional notions of literacy were thought to be barriers to offering a more varied curriculum and pedagogy.	The study focused specifically on a literacy programme rather than overall experiences for young people or staff, so the impact of the research is limited.

Turner-Forbes (2017)	To explored EP perceptions on the possible barriers and facilitators to working with NEET young people.	3 EPs from 3 different EP services with a range of experience in working with NEET young people.	semi-structured interviews	Braun & Clarke's Thematic analysis	Findings showed that there is currently little EP work being undertaken with this age group and that most of the work that is happening is of a preventative, rather than reactive, nature.	The impact of the research is questionable for two reasons. There was a small sample size and research was conducted only several years after the Children's and Families Act so the role of EPs in post-16 was still in its infancy.
Wenham (2020).	To explored lives of NEET and at risk of NEET.	31, 15–25 year olds who lived in an coastal area of deprivation,	2-year ethnographic study, using semi-structured interviews and participatory arts-based approaches.	Thematic analysis	Young people gave accounts of poverty in the community. They described attending a "failing coastal school", poor transition and careers support, low paid work which impacted on their belonging, and achievement. Authors suggested the importance of understanding young people's wider social context in understanding their identities and ability to take opportunities.	The study used a creative approaches to gather young people's views, and reflected on why these approaches were used, indicating transparency and reflection on the methodology.

Wignall, (2019).	To explore the views and experiences of NEET young people.	30 NEET young men aged 14–18 who attended a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) group.	Multiple interviews with leaders, managers, volunteers, and staff, combined with ethnographic observation.	No reported method	The author observed that young people's aspirations and emerging manhood was generated through the nurturing relationships afforded in the YMCA group, that were based on care and responsibility.	A limitation is there was no reported data analysis method, which lacked transparency. Additionally, the researcher was a practitioner (youth worker) as well as a researcher, which could have led to biased observations of the setting. This bias was not sufficiently reflected on.

Appendix D. Example of a completed CASP

C/\SP
Critical Appraisal
Skills Programme

Paper for appraisal and reference: Lőrinc, M., Ryan, L., D ' Angelo, A., & Kaye, N. (2020). De-

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes ✔
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider
• what was the goal of the research
• why it was thought important
• its relevance

Comments: To explore the processes and factors leading to young people becoming NEET after leaving education.

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes ✔
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider
• If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
• Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments: Yes sought explore subjective experiences of young people

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes ✔
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider
• if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments: Yes used interviews and focus groups as wished to explore the views and experperiences of young people. The paper outlined that they wished to complete interviews at two time points to gain a perspectiev on how their accounts changed overtime.

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4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes ✔

Can't Tell

No

HINT: Consider
• If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
• If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
• If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments: Clear explanation of how participants were selected

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes ✔

Can't Tell

No

HINT: Consider
• If the setting for the data collection was justified
• If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
• If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
• If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
• If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
• If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
• If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments: Justification around approaches was outlined. There was a partial lack of transparancy around what questions were answered in the interviews as no topic guide was provided.

CASP
Critical Appraisal
Skills Programme

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ✔

HINT: Consider
- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments: There was no reflections on the researcher and participant relationship or the positionality of the rsearcehr when designing the study.

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes ☐
Can't Tell ☐
No ✔

HINT: Consider
- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments: There was no overt consideration of ethical issues, such as confidentiality, right to withdraw, consent, wellbeing, or ethical approval.

CASP
Crtical Appraisal
Skills Programme

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Yes ✔	HINT: Consider

Yes ✔
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider
- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments: There was an indepth account of analysis process and reasons for selecting the nvivo thematic analysis and narratiev analysis. T

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes ✔
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider whether
- If the findings are explicit
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments: There is a clear statemnet of findings and these are backed up by direct quotes from the participants. However, there could have been improvements in relation to reflections on the analysis process and the credibility of the findings.

CASP
Critical Appraisal
Skills Programme

Section C: Will the results help locally?

| 10. How valuable is the research? | HINT: Consider
• If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature
• If they identify new areas where research is necessary
• If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used |

Comments:	The research is valuable as it highlights the structural barriers experienced by young people. The conclusions are summarised clearly and considered alongside policy, public narrative relating to young people, and psychological theory. The use of Bronfembrenner's ecological systems theory clearly highlights the structural barriers that young people experience.

Appendix E. Pre-interview Script

Introductions name and role.

Rapport building questions: *how has the term been? Has it been a busy week?*

Introduction to the research: *Before we start, I will give a brief introduction to why I am interested in the topic and then there will be some brief bits of housekeeping. So, I am in my 3rd and final year of my doctorate. I currently work in (name of local authority). As part of the training, we are required to complete a thesis. I am interested in how schools are supporting young people at risk of NEET. I am interested in finding out about the individual school context: what you find helps, where there might be barriers or any concerns you have. I will also ask about professionals you work with. I am interested in the potential role of educational psychologists in this area.*

Reminders around confidentiality, consent, right to withdraw, and erasure.

Script around joint interviews *More broadly - I am not trying to catch you out or check what you have been doing, it's more that I am interested in your views of the role schools have in preventing young people becoming NEET. In line with this the interview will follow two guiding principles of "collaboration" and "respect", with the aim to jointly reflect on professional experiences and challenges within the wider school/ political environment, rather than to comment on the practice of colleagues.*

Emotional wellbeing *This is a relatively low risk piece of research – reflecting on practice can be validating and rewarding, however, if you do feel upset about anything we talk about or have any questions after the interview, please do say. I have nothing booked in for the rest of the day, so I will be available to chat.*

Reminders:

- prompt participants back to my research questions

- welcome participants to ask for a question to be repeated where necessary.

Appendix F. Interview Topic Guide

The question highlighted in yellow were added following reflections from the pilot interview.

- **The participants' role in identifying and supporting pupils who are most at risk of becoming NEET**

How did you come into your roles?

What are some of the concerns in your local area around young people becoming NEET?

Who in your school would you say has responsibility in reducing the likelihood of young people becoming NEET?

What are some of the things your role involves in terms of supporting pupils with post-16 transition and opportunities?

What sort of strategies is the school using to identify pupils who are most at risk of becoming NEET?

How are these pupils supported?

- **What do career leads and SENDCos perceive as successful strategies and barriers in this work?**

Can you describe any systems and strategies that seem to work well when supporting pupils who are most at risk of becoming NEET?

Can you describe a piece of work with a pupil that was successful or went well?

What potential barriers can make this work more challenging? Is there anything you would change at a professional or political level that would make this work easier?

- **What support is currently received from other professionals, including educational psychologists, and could educational psychologists offer further support?**

How do you work alongside other colleagues in the school to support pupils to find opportunities for post 16? (Prompt) – How do you (Career Leads and SENDCos) work with each other?

What support do you receive from external agencies? How effective is this?

How have you experience support from an educational psychologist in this area? Do you think this support could be expanded?

Are there any other things that you feel would help you more in this aspect of your role?

Is there anything else that either of you would like to discuss that you feel I have not covered in relation to NEET?

Appendix G. Ethical Approval

The areas highlighted in yellow are areas of change following advice from the ethics panel.

SPS RESEARCH ETHICS
APPLICATION FORM: STAFF and DOCTORAL STUDENTS

- This proforma must be completed for each piece of research carried out by members of the School for Policy Studies, both staff and doctoral postgraduate students.
- See the Ethics Procedures document for clarification of the process.
- All research **must** be ethically reviewed before any fieldwork is conducted, regardless of source of funding.
- See the School's policy and guidelines relating to research ethics and data protection, to which the project is required to conform.
- Please stick to the word limit provided. **Do not attach** your funding application or research proposal.

Key project details:

1.	**Proposer's Name**	Eleanor Garrett
2.	**Proposer's Email Address:**	Eleanor.garrett@bristol.ac.uk
3.	**Project Title**	How do secondary school SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET, and how might educational psychologists support in this area?

4.	**Project Start Date:**	05/2021	**End Date:**	09/2022

Who needs to provide Research Ethics Committee approval for your project?

The SPS REC will only consider those research ethics applications which do not require submission elsewhere. As such, you should make sure that your proposed research does not require a NHS National Research Ethics Service (NRES) review e.g. does it involve NHS patients, staff or facilities – see http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/
If you are not sure where you should apply please discuss it with either the chair of the Committee or the Faculty Ethics Officer who is based in RED.

Social care research projects which involve NHS patients, people who use services or people who lack capacity as research participants need to be reviewed by a Social Care Research Ethics Committee (see https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/policies-standards-legislation/social-care-research/). Similarly research which accesses unanonymised patient records (without informed consent)

must be reviewed by a REC and the National Information Governance Board for Health and Social Care (NIGB).

Who needs to provide governance approval for this project?

If this project involves access to patients, clients, staff or carers of an NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation, it falls within the scope of the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social. You will also need to get written approval from the Research Management Office or equivalent of each NHS Trust or Social Care Organisation.

When you have ethical approval, you will need to complete the research registration form: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/study-notification.html
Guidance on completing this form can be found at: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-governance/registration-sponsorship/guidance.pdf. Contact the Research Governance team (research-governance@bristol.ac.uk) for guidance on completing this form and if you have any questions about obtaining local approval.

Do you need additional insurance to carry out your research?

Whilst staff and doctoral students will normally be covered by the University's indemnity insurance there are some situations where it will need to be checked with the insurer. If you are conducting research with: Pregnant research subjects or children under 5 you should email: insurance-enquiries@bristol.ac.uk
In addition, if you are working or travelling overseas you should take advantage of the university travel insurance (see http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/insurance/travel-insurance/).

Do you need a Disclosure and Barring Service check?

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). Criteria for deciding whether you require a DBS check are available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about

You should specifically look at the frequency, nature, and duration of your contact with potentially vulnerable adults and or children. If your contact is a one-off research interaction, or infrequent contact (for example: 3 contacts over a period of time) you are unlikely to require a check.
If you think you need a DBS check then you should consult the University of Bristol web-page: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/legal/dbs/

5.   If your research project requires REC approval elsewhere please tell us which committee, this includes where co-researchers are applying for approval at another institution. Please provide us with a copy of your approval letter for our records when it is available.

6. Have all subcontractors you are using for this project (including transcribers, interpreters, and co-researchers not formally employed at Bristol University) agreed to be bound by the School's requirements for ethical research practice?

Yes	
No/Not yet	
Not applicable	**x**

Note: You must ensure that written agreement is secured before they start to work. They will be provided with training and sign a detailed consent form.

7. If you are a PhD/doctoral student please tell us the name of your research supervisor(s).

Rob Green (primary); David Abbott (secondary)

Please confirm that your supervisor(s) has seen this final version of your ethics application?

Yes	**x**
No	

8. Who is funding this study?

n/a

If this study is funded by the ESRC or another funder requiring lay representation on the ethics committee and is being undertaken by a member staff, this form should be submitted to the Faculty REC.

Post-graduate students undertaking ESRC funded projects should submit their form to the SPS Research Ethics Committee (SPS REC).

9. Is this application part of a larger proposal?

No	**x**
Yes	

If yes, please provide a summary of the larger study and indicate how this application relates to the overall study.

10.	Is this proposal a replication of a similar proposal already approved by the SPS REC? Please provide the SPS REC reference number.

No	**x**	
Yes		

If Yes, please tell us the name of the project, the date approval was given and code (if you have one).

Please describe any differences (such as context) in the current study. If the study is a replication of a previously approved study. Submit these first two pages of the form.

ETHICAL RESEARCH PROFORMA

The following set of questions is intended to provide the School Research Ethics Committee with enough information to determine the risks and benefits associated with your research. You should use these questions to assist in identifying the ethical considerations which are important to your research. You should identify any relevant ethical issues and how you intend to deal with them. Whilst the REC does not comment on the methodological design of your study, it will consider whether the design of your study is likely to produce the benefits you anticipate. **Please avoid copying and pasting large parts of research bids or proposals which do not directly answer the questions.** Please also avoid using *unexplained* acronyms, abbreviations or jargon.

1.	**IDENTITY & EXPERIENCE OF (CO) RESEARCHERS:** Please give a list of names, positions, qualifications, previous research experience, and functions in the proposed research of all those who will be in contact with participants

Eleanor Garrett- Trainee Educational Psychologist in my second year of study at Bristol University. Previously, I studied a psychology degree at Cardiff University and completed a piece of quantitative research as part of the course, which involved comparing the profile of children with ADHD seen in psychiatric and paediatric settings in Wales.

2.	**STUDY AIMS/OBJECTIVES [maximum of 200 words]:** Please provide the aims and objectives of your research.

This research aims to explore what secondary schools are doing to identify and support those at risk of becoming NEET*, identify successes and barriers, and consider how educational psychologists may be able to offer support. (*NEET is a governmental category used to describe 16- to 24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training).

NEET prevention is a priority nationally, and the role secondary schools have in the area is increasing with each school having a dedicated Career Lead, in addition to SENDCos who have responsibilities with post-16 transition. The experiences that these professionals have in preventing NEET is an under-researched area. Additionally, the role that educational psychologists could have in preventing NEET has been recognised in the literature (Cockerill & Arnold, 2016), although very little research has considered how this may work in practice.

RQs

- What are secondary schools currently doing to identify and support those at risk of becoming NEET?
- What do career leads and SENDCos perceive to be challenges and successful strategies in this work?
- How can professionals work together to prevent NEET, and how might educational psychologists offer further support in this area?

RESEARCH WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(If you are undertaking secondary data analysis, please proceed to section 11)

3.	**RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLING STRATEGY [maximum of 300 words]:** Please tell us what you propose to do in your research and how individual participants, or groups of participants, will be identified and sampled. Please also tell us what is expected of research participants who consent to take part (Please note that recruitment procedures are covered in question 8)

All maintained and academy secondary schools (N=47) in the local authority that I am on placement in as part of my training to be an educational psychologist will be contacted. SENDCos and Career Leads will be invited to take part in a joint semi-structured interview (10-15 pairs) over video conference call on Microsoft Teams.

It is hoped that joint interviews will offer the following benefits over conducting interviews individually or interviewing only Career Leads, or only SENDCos.

- It will enable a greater number of schools to take part while fitting within the time constraints of the project, meaning a greater breadth of information should be gathered.
- It is hoped a deeper understanding of what happens within individual schools will be gathered due to there being two participants from a school taking part. Career Leads will offer an understanding of their specific role, whereas SENDCos, who sit within the senior leadership team may have a greater insight into processes that are occurring within the wider school environment.
- It is thought that joint interviews will encourage a sharing of practice between the SENDCo and Career Leads, and possible ideas of how staff in the roles could work together in the future.
- Staff may feel less daunted by taking part in an interview alongside a colleague.

I will use my educational psychology training and experience of conducting joint consultations in my role to include interviewees equally and state that the interviews aim to be "collaborative and respectful" to avoid the potential for critical comments between participants (expanded upon in section 6).

While it is the aim to do joint interviews, in awareness that there may be difficulties in recruitment, I will use the following contingency plans:

- Where the SENDCo and Career Lead roles are filled by the same person, an individual interview will be conducted.
- It may be necessary to interview only one person from a pair. This may occur if one person from a pair is unable to do the interview at the last minute, or if I am struggling to recruit for the research.

If one person from a pair request to withdraw their data, due to the difficultly of separating answers from a joint interview, both participants responses will be removed, up to the point that data has been anonymised.

Interview questions will follow a topic guide which is provided in appendix 5.

The topic guide will be refined after conducting a pilot interview with a peer Career Lead in a separate local authority.

The interviews will be transcribed by the researcher using Microsoft word and examined using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012) thematic analysis, using an inductive process. The themes will be checked with my research supervisor to ensure quality and validity.

The support offered in schools will be considered in terms of the Gatsby Benchmark and psychological theories. The author will consider the potential role for educational psychologists.

| 4. | **EXPECTED DURATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY:** Please tell us how long each researcher will be working on fieldwork/research activity. For example, conducting interviews between March to July 2019. Also tell us how long participant involvement will be. For example: Interviewing 25 professional participants for a maximum of 1 hour per interview. |

Participants will be recruited as soon as ethical approval is granted. Interviews should be conducted from June to December 2021 (excluding school summer holidays), but this period may be extended if there are delays in recruitment. 10-15 pairs will be interviewed for approximately 1 hour per interview.

| 5. | **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND TO WHOM: [maximum 100 words]** Tell us briefly what the main benefits of the research are and to whom. |

- Interviewees may experience catharsis, validation, and recognition.
- As career leads and SENDCos will be interviewed together this can also be an opportunity to share practice.
- The successes and barriers in supporting pupils at risk of becoming NEET will be highlighted, which may have implications at a practice and policy level.
- An insight will be gathered into the experience of staff members in these roles and may identify possible ways that an educational psychologist can further support schools
- I will produce a summary of NEET prevention and intervention strategies for my educational psychology service based on a literature review.
- Findings will be fed back to participating schools in an accessible summary to value their contribution.

| 6. | **POTENTIAL RISKS/HARM TO PARTICIPANTS [maximum of 100 words]:** What potential risks are there to the participants and how will you address them? List any potential physical or psychological dangers that can be anticipated? You may find it useful to conduct a more formal risk assessment prior to conducting your fieldwork. The University has an example risk assessment form and guidance : http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/media/gn/RA-gn.pdf and http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policies/ |

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED

Example 1: Participants may be upset during the interview	*Example 1: If a participant gets upset I will stop the interview at that time. I will give participants information about support services at the end of the interview.*
Example 2: A participants may tell me something about illegal activity	*Example 2: The information sheet and consent form will warn of the limits of confidentiality and I will have a confidentiality protocol (submitted to the committee).*
Participants might get upset during the interview	If a participant gets upset, I will offer support and reassurance. Participants will be reminded they can stop the interview at any time. I will offer a space after the interview in case there is anything that needs to be followed up.
Participants may discuss children or families using names or identifiable features even though consent has not been gained	Prior to the interview, I will remind participants to refrain from using names. If names are accidentally used, I will politely remind participants of this. Any identifiable factors will be removed from quotes and not included in the write up of the research.
A participant discloses something that leads us to think they or others are at risk	The confidentiality protocol will be given to participants. The settings safeguarding procedure will be adhered to.
Although participant names will be anonymised, they may be identifiable by others who read the research.	Limitations of confidentiality will be included in the participant information sheet and consent forms. I will remind participants of this prior to the interview commencing.
Participants will be overheard by other staff members	I will discuss the need for interviews to be conducted in a private room that will not be disturbed for the duration.
Participants may feel that the researcher is trying to highlight weaknesses in their practice.	I will use techniques from my educational psychology training to make sure the participants feel at ease, spending time to build rapport, and reflecting back examples of good practice and strengths.
Participants may become upset due to the other participant expressing a critical comment, or talking more.	At the beginning of the interview, I will state that the interview will follow two guiding principles of "collaboration" and "respect", with the aim to jointly reflect on professional experiences and challenges within the wider school/ political environment, rather than to comment on the practice of colleagues. I will use my training and experience in conducting joint consultations as a trainee educational psychologist to include both participants equally.

*Add more boxes if needed.

7.	**RESEARCHER SAFETY [maximum of 200 words]:** What risks could the researchers be exposed to during this research project? If you are conducting research in individual's homes or potentially dangerous places then a researcher safety protocol is mandatory. Examples of safety protocols are available in the guidance.

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED

Example 1: Interview at the participant's home.	*Fieldwork safety protocol will be followed. A colleague will know the start and approximate finish time of the interview. If there is no contact from the researcher, they will ring the researcher. If nocontact is made the confidential address details will be accessed and the police informed.*
I may become upset by hearing the interviewees comments	I will organise interviews so that I have time to reflect and journal afterwards. If there is anything that is particularly distressing, I may confidentially discuss this with my research supervisor.
I may feel pressured by the interviewee to offer advice due to my role as a trainee educational psychologist.	I will remind participants of the objectives of the interview prior to the interview commencing. If an interviewee wants to discuss something outside the interview questions that feels inappropriate, I will politely guide us back to the interview questions.

8.   RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES [maximum of 400 words]: How are you going to access participants? Are there any gatekeepers involved? Is there any sense in which respondents might be "obliged" to participate (for example because their manager will know, or because they are a service user and their service will know), if so how will this be dealt with.

All academy and maintained secondary schools in the local authority where the researcher is on placement will be contacted. An email (appendix 4) addressed to the Head Teacher will explain the aims of the study and ask them to reply saying whether or not they are willing to release a SENDCo and career lead for an hour to take part. The email will also have attached a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent form for reference. After I have received confirmation from the Head Teacher, I will contact the main school reception and ask for the contact address for the SENDCos and Career Leads, who I will then contact directly via email with the aims of the study, participant information sheet and consent forms. As Head Teachers will be gatekeepers in the study, the email will stress that the SENDCo and Career Leads should only take part if they want to. I will send out a follow up email approx. 10 days later to schools that have not replied.

If the initial recruitment is unsuccessful or slow, I will ask Educational Psychologists to send the Participant Information Sheet and Consent form to their link SENDCos, but this will not be sent to schools where Head Teachers have opted out. The email to SENDCos will ask if the study details can be shared with the school Career Leads.

The Participant Information Sheet will explain that if participants are interested in taking part, they should return the Consent Form to my provided university email. The Participant Information Sheet will detail that potential participants are welcome to get in touch if they have any questions, before agreeing to take part and will be reminded of their right to withdraw at any point. The Participant Information Sheet will explain that interviews will be joint, so will need consent of both the school Career Lead and the SENDCo. Where one is not interested in taking part the interview will not go ahead. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent form will detail that in schools where the SENDCo and the Career Lead roles are filled by the same people, that person is welcome to take part in an individual interview. Where individual roles are filled by two people (e.g. the school has 2 or more Career Leads in a shared role) only one person from each role will be able to participate in the interview.

The information sheet also states that participants will be chosen on a first come basis (with a backup list) and how many participants are being sought for the research in total, to avoid disappointment.

9.   INFORMED CONSENT [maximum of 200 words]: How will this be obtained? Whilst in many cases written consent is preferable, where this is not possible or appropriate this should be clearly justified. An age and ability appropriate participant information sheet (PIS) setting out factors relevant to the interests of participants in the study must be handed to them in advance of seeking consent (see materials table for list of what should be included). If you are proposing to adopt an approach in which informed consent is not sought you must explain in detail why this is not considered to be appropriate. If you are planning to use photographic or video images in your method then additional specific consent should be sought from participants.

Eligible schools will be given research packs with a Participant Information Sheet and consent from that explaining the study aims and highlights that the research:

- is completely voluntary.
- will adhere to data protection legislation and transcripts will be saved securely.
- will be confidential, unless a participant discloses something that leads us to think they or others are at risk.
- they can withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

To ensure that participants have understood the aim and nature of the research, the consent form will be read aloud at the start of the interview. The participants will be asked if they have any questions or concerns and will be reminded that they can leave at any time. Participants will be asked whether they are still happy to take part.

Please tick the box to confirm that you will keep evidence of the consent forms (either actual forms or digitally scanned forms), securely for twenty years.	✓

10. If you intend to use an on-line survey (for example Survey Monkey) you need to ensure that the data will not leave the European Economic Area i.e. be transferred or held on computers in the USA. Online Surveys (formally called Bristol Online Surveys) is fully compliant with UK Data Protection requirements – see https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/

Please tick the box to confirm that you will not use any on-line survey service based in the USA, China or outside the European Economic Area (EEA).	✓

11.   DATA PROTECTION: All applicants should regularly take the data protection on-line tutorial provided by the University in order to ensure they are aware of the requirements of current data protection legislation.

University policy is that "personal data can be sent abroad if the data subject gives unambiguous written consent. Staff should seek permission from the University Secretary prior to sending personal data outside of the EEA".

Any breach of the University data protection responsibilities could lead to disciplinary action.

Have you taken the mandatory University data protection on-line tutorial in the last 12 months?
https://www.bris.ac.uk/is/media/training/uobonly/datasecurity/page_01.htm

Yes	✓
No	

Do you plan to send any information/data, which could be used to identify a living person, to anybody who works in a country that is not part of the European Union?
See https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-and-brexit/data-protection-if-there-s-no-brexit-deal/the-gdpr/international-data-transfers/)

No	**x**	
Yes		If **YES** please list the country or countries:

Please outline your procedure for data protection. It is University of Bristol policy that interviews must be recorded on an encrypted device. Ideally this should be a University owned encrypted digital recorder (see http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/transcription/).

If you lose research data which include personal information or a data breach occurs, you MUST notify the University immediately. This means sending an e-mail to data-protection@bristol.ac.uk and telling your Head of School. See additional details at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/data-breaches-and-incidents/

The UK Data Protection Act (2018) include potential fines of up to €20,000,000 for not protecting personal data – so please provide details about how you plan to ensure the protection of ALL research data which could be used to identify a living person.

Interviews will be video recorded through Microsoft teams on my password protected laptop and directly saved to my university of Bristol one drive server immediately after the interview. Only I have access to the laptop and password. Interviews will be transcribed by myself and the transcripts will be anonymously saved on to the university server. During transcription, any identifying features will be removed, and names and settings will be replaced with pseudonyms. During the interview handwritten notes will be taken, these will be typed up and saved on the university server, and subsequently shredded. All files and folders will be saved using non-identifying information.

Raw interview recordings will be destroyed on completion of the project.

12.	**CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**	Yes	No
	All my data will be stored on a password protected server	x	
	I will only transfer unanonymised data if it is encrypted. (For advice on encryption see: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/device/)	x	
	If there is a potential for participants to disclose illegal activity or harm to others you will need to provide a confidentiality protocol.	x	

Please tick the box to **CONFIRM** that you warned participants on the information and consent forms that there are limits to confidentiality and that at the end of the project data will be stored in a secure storage facility. https://www.acrc.bris.ac.uk/acrc/storage.htm

x	

Please outline your procedure for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

All the information provided by the participants will be treated as confidential and stored in accordance with the data protection act. The interviews will be video recorded through Microsoft Teams. The interviews will then be transcribed and all identifying information will be made anonymous by removing information that is not needed or using pseudonyms. The interview recordings and transcripts will be saved anonymously to the University's One Drive server, this will be done on a password protected laptop which only I have access to. In addition, any handmade notes made during the interview, will be kept anonymous and typed up immediately after the interview, shredded and saved in the same way.

Participants will be made aware through the confidentiality protocol and information sheet that although their information will be anonymised, because of the nature of research using settings from one Local Authority, the setting and the participants may be identifiable to others. Participants will also be made aware that if anything is disclosed that indicates potential harm to participants or others, I will have pass this on to other professionals.

DATA MANAGEMENT

13 Data Management

It is RCUK and University of Bristol policy that all research data (including qualitative data e.g. interview transcripts, videos, etc.) should be stored in an anonymised format and made freely and openly available for other researchers to use via the data.bris Research Data Repository and/or the UK Data Archive. What level of future access to your anonymised data will there be:

        Open access?
- Restricted access - what restrictions?
- Closed access - on what grounds?

This raises a number of ethical issues, for example you MUST ensure that consent is requested to allow data to be shared and reused.

      Please briefly explain;
1) How you will obtain specific consent for data preservation and sharing with other researchers?
2) How will you protect the identity of participants? e.g. how will you anonymise your data for reuse.
3) How will the data be licensed for reuse? e.g. Do you plan to place any restrictions on the reuse of your data such as Creative Common Share Alike 2.0 licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/uk/)
4) Where will you archive your data and metadata for re-use by other researchers?

<mark>The data will be open access as the information gained is not particularly sensitive.</mark>

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

14. Secondary Data Analysis

Please briefly explain (if relevant to your research);

(1) What secondary datasets you will use?
(2) Where did you get these data from (e.g. ESRC Data Archive)?
(3) How did you obtain permission to use these data? (e.g. by signing an end user licence)
(4) Do you plan to make derived variables and/or analytical syntax available to other researchers? (e.g. by archiving them on data.bris or at the UK Data Archive)
(5) Where will you store the secondary datasets?

n/a

PLEASE COMPLETE FOR ALL PROJECTS

15.	**DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS [maximum 200 words]:** Are you planning to send copies of data to participants for them to check/comment on? If so, in what format and under what conditions? What is the anticipated use of the data, forms of publication and dissemination of findings etc.? .

Raw data will be for the researcher only, no raw data will be sent to any participants or settings. A 45000word thesis will be written summarising my research, that will be available for Bristol University Students and online thesis platforms. Direct quotes from interviews may be used within a report or presentation, but with no identifiable features. Findings will be fed back to participating schools in an accessible summary to value their contribution. Findings will also be presented to my local authority educational psychology service in an accessible summary.

16.	**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**: Please identify which of the following documents, and how many, you will be submitting within your application: Guidance is given at the end of this document (appendix 1) on what each of these additional materials might contain.

Additional Material:	NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS
Participants information sheet (s)	1 (Appendix 1)
Consent form (s)	1 (Appendix 2)
Confidentiality protocol	1 (Appendix 3)
Recruitment email	1 (Appendix 4)
Topic Guide for interview	1 (Appendix 5)
Photo method information sheet	
Photo method consent form	
Support information for participant	
3rd party confidentiality agreement	

Please DO NOT send your research proposal or research bid as the Committee will not look at this

SUBMITTING AND REVIEWING YOUR PROPOSAL:

– To submit your application you should create a **single Word document** which contains your application form and all additional material and submit this information to the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email to sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk

– If you are having problems with this then please contact the SPS Research Ethics Administrator by email (sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk) to discuss.

- Your form will then be circulated to the SPS Research Ethics Committee who will review your proposal on the basis of the information provided in this single PDF document. The likely response time is outlined in the 'Ethics Procedures' document. For staff applications we try to turn these around in 2-3 weeks. Doctoral student applications should be submitted by the relevant meeting deadline and will be turned around in 4 weeks.

- Should the Committee have any questions or queries after reviewing your application, the chair will contact you directly.   If the Committee makes any recommendations you should confirm, in writing, that you will adhere to these recommendations before receiving approval for your project.

- Should your research change following approval it is your responsibility to inform the Committee in writing and seek clarification about whether the changes in circumstance require further ethical consideration.

Failure to obtain Ethical Approval for research is considered research misconduct by the University and is dealt with under their current misconduct rules.

Chair: Beth Tarleton   (beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk)

Administrator: Hannah Blackman   (sps-ethics@bristol.ac.uk)

Date form updated by SPS REC: January 2019

Appendix H. Confirmation of Approval

SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox

To:Eleanor Garrett

Sat 03/07/2021 12:43

Dear Eleanor

How do secondary school SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET, and how might educational psychologists support in this area?(SPSREC2021171)

Thank you for responding so fully to the SPS REC comments regarding the project above.

The committee has now given ethical approval to your research. Your research can now be conducted in accordance with the application and additional responses the committee has reviewed.

If you require a formal letter of approval, please contact (name).

Please do let me know if your project changes, you may need an amendment to your ethical approval. If this is the case, please email me, via the sps-ethics mailbox, including the following information:
· The title and reference number of your application
· The reason for the amendment
· The proposed change to the methods
· Any ethical considerations related to the proposed change in methods

We hope your research goes really well.

With very best wishes.

(name)
On behalf of the SPS REC

Appendix I. Information Sheet, Consent, Confidentiality Protocol & Recruitment Email

Information Sheet for SENDCos and Career Leads

Dear SENDCos and Career Leads,

My name is Eleanor, I am a trainee Educational Psychologist currently working at the Educational Psychology Service in (name of local authority). As part of my training, I am completing a doctorate at the University of Bristol and I am looking for participants to take part in my research.

- **What is the purpose of the study and why have I been invited to take part?**

The aim of the research is to explore how secondary school SENDCos and Career Leads support pupils into post-16 opportunities. I am particularly interested in how they support pupils who may be at a risk of becoming NEET when they leave secondary school. I am interested in hearing your successes, as well as things that may be challenging or barriers experienced in the wider environment. I would also like to hear about the support offered by other professionals. I am wondering if the role of the educational psychologist in preventing young people from becoming NEET could be expanded and hearing your views will be really useful in guiding this.

(*NEET is a governmental category used to describe 16- to 24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training).

- **What will happen if I take part?**

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. If you do wish to participate, the research will involve a 1hour semi-structured interview that is conducted over a video conference call (Microsoft Teams). This will be a joint interview with both the school career lead and SENDCo present. If you are in both of these roles (i.e. a career lead *and* a SENDCo) then you can participate in the interview independently. The audio (not video) recording from the meeting will be saved and downloaded. I will endeavour to find a time that is convenient for you. You will need access to a quiet, private room for the duration of the interview and a laptop with access to Microsoft Teams.

I am hoping to talk to 10-15 pairs of career leads and SENDCos. In the event, that a greater number express an interest in the study, participants will be chosen by date of response, with the additional participants given the opportunity to participate if any of the original number withdraw from the research.

- **What are the benefits and risks of taking part?**

It is hoped that being interviewed alongside your colleague will offer a safe and supportive space and the opportunity to jointly reflect on practice. Your comments may help to highlight the successes and the barriers of preventing young people from becoming NEET, which may have implications at a practice and policy level. An insight will be gathered into the experience of staff members in these roles and may identify possible ways that an educational psychologist can further support schools in preventative NEET work. Schools will be provided with an accessible summary of the research following project completion.

The research is relatively low risk. However, while reflecting on practice can be validating and rewarding, it can also feel upsetting at times. If you become upset during the interview, I will offer support and reassurance and a space after the interview to discuss anything that came up. It will also be possible to stop the interview at any time.

- **What will happen if I do not take part?**

Nothing- taking part is completely voluntary and it is up to you if you want to participate or not. If only one of you (i.e. just the school SENDCo or Career Lead) want to take part in the research, the interview will not go ahead.

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

The information you provide will be used to identify common themes of successes and challenges when supporting young people into post-16 opportunities. The findings from this research will be written up as part of my doctorate in Educational Psychology and be available to read on online thesis platforms. The findings may also be communicated as an accessible summary to the Educational Psychology Service in (name of local authority), where I am currently on placement.

- **Anonymisation & confidentiality**

To ensure the anonymity and privacy of participants, I will ensure that all data is stored securely in line with the data protection act. I will anonymise all information using pseudonyms for participants and settings and will endeavour to remove all identifying factors when commenting on or quoting a participant in the research report. Participants will be asked to not use the names of pupils, families, professionals, and colleagues during the interview, but if this does happen the information will be anonymised in the transcript. Although all possible measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality, there are limits to this. There is a possibility that someone reading the report may recognise a participant or setting known to them.

Recordings and transcripts will be securely saved on the University Server on a password-protected laptop that only I have access to. After transcription, all raw data will be deleted.

- **Withdrawal & Right to Erasure**

In line with the 2018 Data Protection Act, all participants have a right to withdraw their data at any time and for any reason. If one person from a pair request to withdraw their data, due to the difficultly of separating answers from a joint interview, both participants responses will be removed. All requests for erasure will be complied with, up to the point that the data has been anonymised, where I may not be able to withdraw individual data.

- **What would the next step be if would like to participate?**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you are interested in taking part in the research, please complete and return the consent form listed below. The researcher will go through the consent form with the participant again at the start of the interview, to ensure all aspects of the research have been understood.

Please return your completed consent form, along with any further questions about the research to:
Eleanor.garrett@bristol.ac.uk

If there are any complaints about the research practice, please contact my research supervisor:
Rob.green@bristol.ac.uk.

All the best,
Eleanor Garrett
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Bristol

Informed Consent for research into how SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to identifying and supporting those most at risk of becoming NEET, and how educational psychologists might support in this area.

Please read each statement below and indicate your response (Yes or No) in the column below.

Please sign and date at the bottom of the page to give your consent.

Please note to participate in the study there needs to be two signed consent forms, one from the career lead and one from the SENDCo.

Taking part in the Research	Yes/No
I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I consent to taking part in a 1-hour long interview, alongside a colleague over Microsoft Teams.	
I give consent for the interview to be video-recorded.	
I understand that if I share information that potentially puts me or someone else at risk of harm, the researcher may need to inform other professionals.	
I understand my involvement in the research is voluntary, I can refuse to answer a question and I can change my mind about participating at any time, without having to give a reason.	
Use of the information in the Research	**Yes/No**
I understand that any identifying information will be removed during transcription and any names and settings will be replaced with pseudonyms.	
I understand that any other identifying information will not be shared beyond the researcher.	
I understand all information will be kept on a secure server, in an anonymised file, that only the researcher has access to.	
I understand that I have the right to request that all information is deleted at any time, but the researcher may not be able to comply with the request if the data has already been anonymised.	
I understand that direct quotes and information provided by me may be included within the research report	

Name:

Role (Career Lead or SENDCo):

Signature: **Date:**

Please contact the researcher (Eleanor) for further information:
Eleanor.garrett@bristol.ac.uk

Confidentiality Protocol

All data obtained through this study will be anonymised and treated with confidentiality. However, there are limits to this confidentiality and participants will be made aware of the limitations of confidentiality prior to participation.

The researchers will endeavour to remove all identifying factors when commenting on or quoting a participant. However, there is a possibility that someone reading the report may recognise a participant known to them. This has been highlighted within the participant information sheet and will be discussed with the participant before the interview.

If a participant discloses information that suggests that they or others are at risk of harm, the following procedure will be followed:

- If a clear issue of concern, such as a child protection issue, the individual will be made aware that the issue will need to be shared sensitively with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) at the setting.
- The researchers will make a written account of the issue and pass this on to the DSL.
- All participants will be advised to speak to the researcher regarding any questions or concerns that they may have as a result of the research.

Recruitment email

Dear Head Teacher,

My name is Eleanor, I am a trainee Educational Psychologist currently completing a doctorate at Bristol University and working at the Educational Psychology Service in (name of local authority). I am getting in contact as I am hoping to recruit participants for my doctoral research. I am looking for SENDCos and Career Leads to participate in a joint 1-hour interview with me over Microsoft Teams. The research is exploring how SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to identifying and supporting those most at risk of becoming NEET (a governmental category used to describe 16- to 24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training). It is hoped that the research will provide useful information to inform future practice and identify possible ways that an educational psychologist may further support schools in this area.

I have attached an information sheet and consent form for further information.

Taking part is completely voluntary, and the SENCDO and Career Lead should only take part if they want to. If you are happy for them to consider taking part in the research, please reply to this email expressing your interest. I will then seek their contact details through the school office and contact them directly with the information sheet and consent form to see if they wish to participate. It will require them to be released from their duties for one hour and given access to a private room and laptop. I will endeavour to find a time that is suitable for the school.

If you or your colleagues have any further questions, do not hesitate to get in contact. My email address is:

Eleanor.garrett@bristol.ac.uk

All the very best and thank you for reading this email,

Eleanor Garrett
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Bristol

Appendix J. Confirmation & Correspondence for Recruitment via Telephone (anonymised)

Dear Eleanor

Thank you for emailing us about your study:

How do secondary school SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET, and how might educational psychologists support in this area?(SPSREC2021171)

Please take this email as confirmation of an amendment to your ethical approval with regard to: contacting potential participants via telephone.

Best wishes

On behalf of the SPS REC

From: Eleanor Garret█████████████████████k>
Sent: 22 November 2021 12:27
To: SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox██████████████████k>
Subject: Re: Response from the SPS REC

Hello,

I will ask the career lead to discuss the research with the school sencos and reiterate for them to share that they only should take part if they want to. For career leads that are interested I will email the consent form and information sheet to them and the sencos (or ask them to pass this on) these forms clearly state that each participant should only take part if they want to and uses individual consent forms. I will offer sencos the opportunity to discuss the research with me separately and ask any questions they might have.

Best wishes,

Eleanor

Get Outlook for Android

From: SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛uk>
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 5:17:35 PM
To: Eleanor Garrett ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛uk>
Subject: Re: Response from the SPS REC

Hi

This sounds great.

How would you then get the SENDCos involved? Will you get the career leads to pass on information? Might they feel pressured to take part?

Sorry to ask more questions

best

⬛⬛⬛⬛

From: Eleanor Garrett ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛k>
Sent: 17 November 2021 19:25
To: SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛uk>
Subject: Re: Response from the SPS REC

Hi ⬛⬛⬛⬛

Thanks for your reply. Hopefully I have answered your questions below:

Some career leads have a telephone number on their careers page, so for those ones I would contact directly. For the others I would call the school office and ask the reception staff if I could speak to the career lead. To the office staff, I would say I am a trainee Educational psychologist and I wish to speak to them about potentially taking part in a piece of research.

I would use my skype account associated with (name of local authority) Educational Psychology Service (they are supportive of the research) to call schools.
I would call all secondary schools in (name of local authority), apart from those who have previously responded to my emails. I would call once and leave a message for those that are unavailable, briefly introducing myself, the research, and asking me to call back if they are interested on my skype number or to respond via email. I would follow up once for those who have not responded 10days or more after my initial message.

The script I would use is:

Hello. My name is Eleanor. I am a trainee Educational Psychologist currently completing a doctorate at Bristol University and working at (name of local authority) *Educational Psychology Service. I am getting in contact as I am hoping to recruit participants for my doctoral research. I am looking for SENDCos and Career Leads to participate in a joint 1-hour interview with me over Microsoft Teams.*
The research is exploring how SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers to identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET. It is hoped that the research will provide useful information to inform future practice and identify possible ways that an educational psychologist may further support schools in this area.
Taking part is completely voluntary and you should only take part if you want to. If you are interested I will send over my research information sheet and consent form so that you can think about it in more detail.
I will say they can let me know if they want to take part by responding to my email. I will ask if they have any questions.

Let me know if you have any further queries.

Best wishes,

Eleanor

From: SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬k>
Sent: Wednesday, 17 November 2021, 09:43
To: Eleanor Garrett
Subject: Re: Response from the SPS REC

Hi Eleanor

Sorry to hear you are struggling with recruitment.   A few quick questions:
are the career leads contact details publicly available? or how would you get the contact details.
how many calls would you make?
what would be included in your script

best

▬▬▬▬

From: Eleanor Garrett ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛
Sent: 17 November 2021 07:54
To: SPS Ethics Applications Mailbox ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛
Subject: Re: Response from the SPS REC

Dear ⬛⬛⬛⬛

I am writing to request an amendment for the following project:

How do secondary school SENDCos and Career Leads perceive the successes and barriers
to identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET, and how
might educational psychologists support in this area?(SPSREC2021171)

My recruitment has come to a bit of a standstill after sending direct emails and emails through
the link educational psychologists (plus follow ups). One participant suggested I call career leads
to ask for their involvement, as she said they receive so many emails it is easy to miss
one. would this be ok? I will use a script explaining that participation is voluntary and they only
have to take part if they want to. I previously only had ethical approval for email based
recruitment.

Best wishes,

Eleanor

Appendix K. Coded Transcript (anonymised)

Arthur (career leader)
Yeah, so the children that we worry about most, there's a few things that I worry about from a career perspective. The first is there's a lack of aspiration locally, so children in the area don't aspire very well to jobs and that's without being disparaging to the ones that they end up doing sometimes. But you know, we've got about, I dunno 40% are from the valley, so from farming communities from rural places, like you know the edges of (name of area) and places like that. And so, you can often find very able children or children with lots of potential, who, you know, who's only sole focus is that, "I'm going to go and work doing what my dad does" or "I'm gonna do those kind of things" and then even when you have got children who are perhaps aspirational to university and going on to other places, they often don't think much further than (name of area) or, you know, the area in which they live. And I think the other challenge for us is around, we lose a lot of our children around post 16 to other institutions.

> **Commented [EG10]:** Influence of community on aspirations

> **Commented [EG11]:** Impacts of rural geography

> **Commented [EG12]:** family influence on aspirations

Eleanor Garrett
Right?

Arthur (career leader)
So the bright lights of (name of college) draw a lot away from us as does (name of college). Less so (name of college), though certainly (name of college) and because we've got (name of area) with the train links and the bus links you know, and a lot of our cohort come from up the valley so actually it is quite close to them.

Eleanor Garrett
Right?

Arthur (career leader)
Uh, and we tend to lose them so actually, you know from a year group of, an average year group of 180, we might get 70 of our children stay with us. And so, we lose control, a little bit over where they're going and what they're doing. But I would say we're very, very successful at getting children into programs at the end of year 11, and at the end of year 13, I think we've got a system that supports that, and very few children if anything are ever NEET.

> **Commented [EG13]:** The post-16 environment is less supportive (outside of sixth from)

Eleanor Garrett
yeah.

Arthur (career leader)
Right, but the aspiration does hold some of them back.

> **Commented [EG14]:** aspirations as a barrier

Eleanor Garrett
Right?

Arthur (career leader)
And then, what you've also got on top of that is because they don't have a great sense of where they can end up going or what they could do. And or even that interested in what they could do. They tend to choose courses sometimes that are beneath them or their academic progress is not as good as it could be because they don't have the aspiration to go and be better. So I would say that we send, I can't put numbers on it, but there are a number of children each year where they will go off

> **Commented [EG15]:** Lack of awareness of future options as a barrier

> **Commented [EG16]:** Students in opportunities, but ones perceived by school as not ambitious enough

and do level one or level 2 multi trades something like that where actually if they had pulled their finger out, had more aspiration, had that stuff around them, family guidance and all that kind of stuff that comes alongside, and school, you know, I'm not taking us out of that, then actually they should be looking at A levels. They should be looking at apprenticeships. They should be looking at XY and Z and they haven't had that. And then the final price I suppose is that it's the complexity of things like apprenticeships and accessing those and the timings of apprenticeships are not the same as our Academic year. So, you know, Year 11 had their assembly on their futures this morning, you know, what does careers guidance look like for you this year? And so we're starting to say right, you know, apprenticeships for some of you and what you need to do. But actually, they can't apply to apprenticeship until June.

> **Commented [EG17]:** Aspirations as a barrier

> **Commented [EG18]:** Lack of parental support as a barrier

> **Commented [EG19]:** Support in school as a barrier

> **Commented [EG20]:** Barrier within system for applying for apprenticeships

Eleanor Garrett

Yeah. Shell, I'm wondering if you have anything to come in on there in terms of those pupils that you're more worried about in terms of who might be at risk of becoming NEET?

Shell (SENDCo)
Yeah, I think I worry about some of our SEND K students, not all of them, and some of our EHCP students. At the at the extreme end of special educational needs, you know, we've got children leaving here at 16 to go on to specialist courses. So, whether that specialist course is through our local (name of college) or whether that's a specialist, you know, specialist schools that offer post 16 provision. I think that those students we get that right and we work that transition really effectively, so that minimizes the risk of them becoming NEET because we know they're on the right course. We know they've got the right support. For those K students for whom most of their academic life, they've had some form of support within the classroom and because they've had that often, it's more about that key adult that relationship that they've built with somebody who's keeping them going through school, dealing with all the little wobbles, the little issues. When they go on to post 16 provision, it's not there. They're meant to cope in a far more independent way, even if in my experience, where we've passed that information on and said you are going to need to know about this child, please pick them up. It often doesn't happen. And I think we have very few children who go from here to nothing where. You know, we are careful to pick some of those things up and they will go and we will know that they've enrolled at college, we will know that they've enrolled, you know where they've gone on that first day. But then after that, that's when I think the issue comes because they realize they don't have that same level of support. Some of them will come back here. We have three or four every year who say college wasn't for me. I'm coming back, but in in lots of cases we don't have the right courses for them, and therefore I think those are the students I worry about becoming NEET, more so than our sort of extreme end, so to speak, of SEND where the needs are much more profound and multiple and challenging.

Commented [EG26]: Less support for students with moderate SEND

Commented [EG27]: Staff-student relationship is important

Commented [EG28]: The post-16 environment is less supportive

Commented [EG29]: lack of post-16 courses for low attaining students in sixth form

Eleanor Garrett
Yeah. Yeah, so in the way that the EHCP kind of acts as a safety for those that have it, you know protective, so that you know the next college or whatever it is has to look after those pupils.

Shell (SENDCo)
Yep.

Eleanor Garrett
Where you were saying that the courses available at your sixth form, that they're not the kind of ones that those pupils would be able to access or...?

Shell (SENDCo)
Yeah, in lots of cases. So, we do offer some vocational courses, but it's not particularly extensive there quite a limited number of vocational courses, so unless they have, you know a real desire to be a carpenter or you know some of those courses. Actually, the range of vocational courses here is quite limited and its predominantly level 3, A level type courses. So, for some young people that isn't

Commented [EG30]: lack of post-16 courses for low attaining students in sixth form

Appendix L. Theme Development

<u>Themes and subthemes with codes listed underneath</u>

<u>Theme: Raising aspirations and supporting students to make informed choices</u>

School role in finding out what a student wants to do
Role of school in providing experiential opportunities
Schools have a role in support students to think about the steps beyond post-16
Role of school in empowering students
Role of school in finding appropriate opportunities
Role of school in raising aspirations
Role of school in raising awareness of opportunities
Schools know what is best for students
Experiential opportunities are important
Supporting students to make informed choices
School staff can inspire
apprenticeships are a good option for some
Important that students have the opportunity to actually meet a range of post-16 settings
importance of vocational/ extra-curricular opportunities
aspirations as a barrier
Lack of awareness of future options as a barrier
Influence of community on aspirations
Low ambition as a barrier
Schools have a responsibility to help students gather skills for life
Providing careers skills
Schools have a responsibility in preparing young people for next steps
Students in opportunities but not ones perceived by the school as ambitious enough

<u>Theme: Creating an ethos</u>

Preventing NEET is embedded into the school ethos
Preventing NEET is operates within the support systems in school
Importance of school offering an inclusive provision
Careers embedded within the curriculum
The importance of staff being approachable
effective support system in school
Having the right staff in place is important
Whole school approach

Subtheme: All staff members have a role

Collective responsibility in reducing NEET
Ad hoc staff communication
Communication between staff is important
formal structures
informal support systems
staff working together

Importance of colleagues supporting one another
Working together (career lead & SENDCo)
Insight of staff working directly with students
staff working directly with students have a valuable role
SENDCo not involved in preventing NEET
Career leader should have a distinct role
Role of SENDCo in negotiating support with SLT
Two career leaders help
school staff should have designated roles

Subtheme: Nurturing relationships

Understanding individual students
Staff-student relationship is important

Theme: Targeting support
Subtheme: Supporting individual students

Role of schools in identifying students that are at risk
Perception that children in care are less of a concern
Hands on support
Targeted support
Children in care at greater risk
Student attainment as a barrier
SEMH needs as a barrier
Less support for students with moderate SEND

Subtheme: Working with parents & families

Supporting parents
Working with parents/ carers
family influence on aspirations
Parental anxieties can be a barrier
Parental understanding of the education, SEND, and support systems as a barrier
Impact of situation at home
Parental engagement with school can be a barrier

Theme Working in and with (strained) systems

Subtheme: Capacity within school

School accountability for attainment a barrier
Too many administrative tasks
Capacity of school staff
increase in students with SEND

Too many expectations placed on school staff
Narrowing of the curriculum is a barrier
Barrier of schools not being able to offer vocational learning
Schools are underfunded
Implementing the new careers strategy is a lot of work

Subtheme: When external professionals support beyond what a school can

School role in referring to external services
strained SEND system
EP gathering views of the young person
EP indirectly supporting to reduce NEET
EP psychological understanding of needs
EP support with anxiety
EP providing targeted support for children in care
EP role in assessment is useful
EP support with planning & reviewing cases
EP support with post-16 transition
EP involvement aiding early intervention
EPs are viewed as credible by external services
EP support had limited impact
EPs not needed to gather the views of the young person
Local careers service offering support beyond what a school can
Dedicated support from local careers service
Local careers service offering targeted support
Local careers service offer valuable work with parents
Local careers service have insight into the range of courses available
Local career service's referral criteria is too strict
Barrier in capacity of local careers service
Linking with post-16 providers
links with external support services
working with independent advice and guidance professionals

Capacity of external services
Challenges in accesses support from external services
Need more support from EPs in general
Limited experience of support from EPs in NEET
Cost of EP support
Capacity of EPs

Theme: The barriers beyond school

Subtheme: Travel & the accessibility of courses
Travel as a barrier

socioeconomic status as a barrier
Accessibility of courses for low attaining students as a barrier

Subtheme: The post-school environment
Additional support needed for settling in period
Post-16 environment outside of sixth form is less supportive
Schools are limited in what they can support with once a student has left
Barrier of traineeships only lasting for 1 month
Availability of apprenticeships as a barrier
Post-16 provision having low expectations for low attaining pupils/ those with SEND
Size of post 16 settings is a barrier
Need more of an enhanced transition to post-16
Post-16 transition support
Support in new setting
student fear of unfamiliar setting
Students not ready for the independence associated with post-16 settings

Appendix M. Excerpt of Reflective Journal

Interview 1 - Reflections

There were already some useful take homes from this interview in terms of my research questions:
- Schools have a lot to offer in terms of tailored approaches for individual pupils.
- Staff appear to work together on an ad hoc basis
      ⤷ This part seems beneficial.
- There are physical barriers around transport relating to the rural location
      ⤷ interviewees focused on this.
- Interesting insights into how EB are viewed.

Reflections on my interviewing:
- ~~Surpring~~ Surprisingly this interview ended early at 50 minutes - do I need to ask more follow up questions?
- Participants felt comfortable + at ease.
- At times participants listed the strategies they were using and external services they worked with. It felt like they wanted me to know everything they had been doing, possibly related to ~~be~~ my role as a trainee EP and the percieved authority. However its more important I understand why these strategies + services are valuable. Next time, I need to ask more inquisitive questions around "how" and "why" rather than "what".