

**Exploring virtual learning as an alternative
provision to support young people
experiencing challenges to attending school**

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP: Alternative provision

ASDAN: Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network

Becta: British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

CAQDAS: Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software

CfP: Computer for Pupils

CFS: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

CPD: Continued Professional Development

CYP: Children and Young People

DCSF: Department for Children, Schools and Families

DfE: Department for Education

DfES: Department for Education and Skills

DVDs: Digital Video Discs

ECM: Every Child Matters

EP: Educational psychologist

FE: Further Education

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

KS: Key Stage

LA: Local Authority

ME: Myalgic Encephalopathy

NEET: Not in education, employment, or training

Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education

PRUs: Pupil Referral Units

RCH: Royal Children's Hospital

RQ: Research question

SEN: Special Educational Need

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disability

TA: Thematic Analysis

TEP: Trainee educational psychologist

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

UNCRC: United Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

USA: United States of America

USB: Universal Serial Bus

VLE: Virtual learning environment

VLP: Virtual learning provision

ABSTRACT

The University of Manchester

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Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

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Children and young people (CYP) can experience a variety of challenges which impact on their attendance at school. Whilst the number of CYP experiencing these challenges make up a relatively small proportion of pupils, persistent absence from school has been linked to a number of poor outcomes in relation to education, wellbeing, confidence and achievement in adult life. As such, regular participation in learning is seen as key to reducing risks and improving outcomes for CYP. A variety of alternative provisions exist to support CYP experiencing challenges to attending school, including a growing number of virtual learning provisions. Despite an increase in these provisions, there is limited published research exploring their effectiveness in supporting young people, particularly those with physical or mental health issues.

An embedded single case study design (Yin, 2009) employing mixed methods was adopted to explore the effectiveness of Innovate; a virtual learning provision employed within several local authorities in England, which supports young people experiencing challenges to attending school. Data were gathered from Innovate's archival records (a fully anonymised database) and through semi-structured interviews with four young people with medical illness, two parents, four Innovate teachers, and one Local Authority customer. Exploratory interviews were also carried out with two Innovate Managers. The archival data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher before being analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Quantitative findings did not suggest the provision was more effective for some young people than others. Findings suggested that where young people attended live lessons, they contributed very well, and behaviour was very good. Qualitative findings suggested that overall, there were a greater number of facilitative factors to the effectiveness of Innovate for young people, than there were barriers. These supported the propositions that virtual learning can; provide a safe and secure learning environment, enable a more personalised and flexible learning experience, and enable young people to have more control over their learning. In line with previous literature, findings also suggested that issues relating to information and communication technologies (ICT) and connectivity can at times inhibit the effectiveness of online provision, although these were usually quickly resolved. The findings are discussed in relation to psychological theory and children's rights as highlighted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Implications for educational psychology practice are considered, as well as suggestions for future research.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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¹ Name has been changed to ensure anonymity.

1 Introduction

Children and young people (CYP) absent from school make up a relatively small proportion of pupils. However, research suggests that schools and local authorities (LAs) are undertaking a greater number of local and national initiatives to combat non-attendance than at any point in the past 50 years (National Audit Office, 2005).

Persistent absenteeism has been linked to poor educational outcomes, psychiatric disorders, and poor achievement in adult life (Berg, 1992; Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk, 2003). CYP who are persistently absent from school tend to have lower academic self-concepts and general levels of self-esteem (Reid, 2008), and are more likely to disengage from learning altogether (Department for Children, Schools and Families (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2007).

With developments in government legislation and policy over recent years calling for reform in improving outcomes for CYP, there is a challenge to continue to improve alternative education provision for young people absent from school, and to ensure that all such CYP receive an “excellent education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential” (Department for Education (DfE), 2018a, p. 3).

Existing research around alternative education provision has considered a wide variety of provision, including the exploration and evaluation of alternative curricula, which aims to support CYP who have become disengaged from the traditional curriculum by providing more vocational and skills-based learning. More recently, with advances in information and communication technology (ICT) and the way in which it can be used, there appears to be a growing number of alternative education provisions employing virtual or online learning to support CYP experiencing challenges to attending school. It is argued that virtual learning can help to improve outcomes for CYP and can personalise learning; providing educational opportunities for those who are experiencing challenges attending school, who have become disengaged with the education system or who are unable to attend school (Galloway, 2009). However, despite an increase in online provisions, there is a paucity of research which explores the use of online technologies as an alternative medium of delivering learning to CYP.

The researcher, who is also employed by a LA as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) has a keen interest in educational interventions employed to support young people who are experiencing challenges affecting their attendance and who are unable to attend school. Having previously carried out a small literature review relating to a similar piece of research carried out by one of her university tutors, the researcher chose to further explore virtual learning as a means of enabling young people to continue learning whilst not at school. The

aim of the current study is to explore a virtual learning provision (VLP) as an alternative medium of curriculum delivery and to seek the views of the young people, their parents/carers, and other key stakeholders regarding its effectiveness. The study aims to contribute to the development of an evidence base in employing online learning to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school. It is hoped that the research will provide a voice for young people and their families regarding the effectiveness of the VLP and how it might be developed further, and that it will help to inform schools, LAs and educational psychologists (EPs) about the potential of virtual learning to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school.

2 Literature review

2.1 Overview

In order to develop an understanding of the context around the current study, the literature review will give consideration to: key legislation and policy relating to education, inclusion and the well-being of CYP; an overview of school absence and factors associated with school absence; research around alternative education provision, and the developing use of ICT as an alternative education provision to support young people absent from school.

2.2 Review strategy

The current review draws on literature relating to the use of virtual or online learning tools to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school. A literature search of online databases such as ASSIA, ERIC, BEI, PSYCHINFO and EBSCOhost was carried out using the terms: school absen*, non-atten*, secondary school, high school, pupil, young per*, alternative education, alternative provision, out-of-school provision, academic provision, online, e-learning, virtual and ICT. Articles were considered through an abstract review. Inclusion criteria included articles written in English, those which were peer reviewed, those involving children and adolescents of school age and those describing, exploring, or evaluating alternative provision which employs online learning or ICT. As the database search was concerned with the use of online learning, articles written before 1994, when the first internet browser went live, (Roblyer, 2008) were excluded. Articles written in languages other than English and those which included adult learners were also excluded. Eight articles were identified from the initial search. The references for all selected papers were also reviewed which led to consideration of a number of related papers. Several other literature search strategies were employed including: Google Scholar using the key search terms identified above; information and relevant documents such as conference proceedings and unpublished research which were sourced online and through university and research colleagues; and Government documents and legislation were reviewed in order to provide an appropriate legislative context.

2.3 Legislative context

Services for children are changing in many ways, not least schools: new ones are being built; more practitioners fulfil more diverse roles...and new technologies enable us to teach pupils both well established and completely new curriculum areas in ways that are more engaging.

(Galloway, 2009)

Developments in government legislation and policy have called for reform in improving outcomes for CYP in recent years. Alongside these changes in service provision for CYP, developments in information communication technology (ICT) have transformed the way in which we are able to interact with the world and have been recognised in government policy both to support these changes in service provision and also to support the way in which CYP learn.

Historically, education has been compulsory for children in Britain since the late 19th century. The Education Act 1944 and its amended version (Education Act 1996), places a duty on parents with a child of compulsory school age to ensure that their child receives an efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability, and aptitude, by attendance at school or otherwise. The Education Act (1996) also places a duty on local authorities (LAs) to ensure such educational provision is provided for children and young people (CYP):

Each local education authority shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable education...for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not...receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them...Suitable education is defined as efficient education suitable to the age, ability, and aptitude and to any special educational needs the child (or young person) may have.

Within the Education Act (1996), amongst CYP not in school only those who had been excluded from school were entitled to access full time education; however, the Children's Schools and Families Act (2010) extended this to ensure that all children not in school receive a suitable full-time education, or part-time education if the local authority considers this to be in the best interests of the child or young person. The more recent Children and Families Act (2014) also places a duty on local authorities to make arrangements to support the learning of pupils with medical conditions. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) which is underpinned by The Children and Families Act (2014) further states that all CYP are entitled to an appropriate education which meets their needs, promotes high standards and enables them to achieve their potential; including achieving their best, being confident and leading a fulfilling life, and successfully transitioning into post-school opportunities (e.g. employment, training, further or higher education).

The right of every child and young person to receive an education which takes into account their strengths and needs and to achieve their potential is also highlighted in international policy. The United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), (United Nations, 1989) is an international legal framework which promotes and protects the rights of CYP under the age of 18, including the right to an education which supports the development of their “personality,

talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (UN, 1989, Article 29.1). Following this, The Salamanca Statement (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1994) promotes an inclusive approach to education stating that every child has the right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and to maintain an acceptable level of learning. It further states that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs, and that educational programmes should take into account the wide diversity of these needs. Whilst ‘inclusive’ education has previously been considered in relation to meeting the needs of CYP with disabilities within general education settings; it is increasingly viewed more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO, 2001). It aims to eliminate social exclusion brought about by attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and ability (Mithaug, 1998). Whilst the Salamanca Statement noted schools as the most effective means for achieving inclusive education, currently there appears to be an overall trend towards providing more effective educational responses for all CYP within the context of general educational provision (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

Developments in United Kingdom (UK) government legislation and policy have called for reform in improving outcomes for CYP in relation to their well-being, particularly those who may be considered vulnerable or who experience challenges which impact on their learning and development. The implementation of Every Child Matters: Change for Children (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004a) identified five main outcomes for CYP: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying, and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. Every Child Matters (ECM) made outcomes for children central to integrated children’s services and was underpinned by the Children Act (2004) which places a duty on LAs to promote cooperation to improve the wellbeing of children. With outcomes for CYP being central to service delivery, there also appeared to be a move towards providing more personalised services (Galloway, 2009). Within education, the concept of ‘Personalised Learning’ was first introduced in a speech by David Milliband in 2004. Echoing previous legislation and policy, it set out to ‘provide an education to every child which is tailored to their unique learning styles, motivations, and needs’ (DfES, 2004b). Receiving some criticism for its “definitional vagueness” (Prain et al. 2013, p. 656) and lack of detail regarding particular features, further definition was given to personalised learning through a report by the (DfES, 2006a) which highlighted a focus around the process of learning, rather than the content:

Close attention is paid to learners’ knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes. Learning is connected with what they already know...Learners are active and curious, they create their own hypotheses, ask their own questions, coach one another, set

goals for themselves, monitor their progress and experiment with ideas for taking risks...

(DfES, 2006a)

Several other developments followed the ECM agenda. In 2007, *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures* (DCSF, 2007), set out government plans relating to the five outcomes which included: securing the health and well-being of CYP; safeguarding the young and vulnerable; closing the gap in educational achievement for CYP from disadvantaged backgrounds; ensuring young people are participating and achieving their potential; and keeping CYP on the path to success. As part of government plans, the Children's Plan set out to improve educational outcomes for CYP, including developing a greater variety of alternative provision (AP) to meet the diverse needs of those who are excluded, unable to attend a mainstream school or who have become disengaged with education. Also highlighted within the plan, was the effective use of technology as a tool to support the needs of learners and families, offering greater choice and flexibility and reducing inequality. Employing ICT to support CYP's learning was previously emphasised as part of the government's e-strategy, 'Harnessing Technology, Transforming Learning and Children's Services' (DfES, 2005), which set out plans to:

- Transform teaching, learning and help to improve outcomes for CYP and adults through shared ideas, more exciting lessons, and online help for professionals.
- Engage 'hard-to-reach' learners with special needs support, more motivating ways of learning and more choice about how and when to learn.
- Build an open, accessible system, with more information and services online for parents and carers, CYP, adult learners and employers; and more cross-organisation collaboration to improve personalized support and choice.
- Achieve greater efficacy and effectiveness, with online research, access to shared ideas and lesson plans, improved systems and processes in children's services, shared procurement, and easier administration.

Following the government's e-strategy issues were raised regarding access to ICT for some young people and their families across the UK. The perceived gap between those with access to ICT and its learning benefits, and those from lower income families who may not be able to access ICT, became known as the 'digital divide'. A study by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta); the former government agency concerned with the use of effective and innovative technology to support learning, revealed that over one million school aged children in the UK were unable to access a computer at home and over two million were unable to go online (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta), 2007). With the aim of promoting equality of access to ICT, the government launched

the Computer for Pupils (CfP) (DfES, 2006b) initiative which aimed to give pupils in the most disadvantaged areas the same opportunities as their peers; provide the conditions which could contribute towards raising educational achievement, support personalised learning by providing access to ICT wherever or whenever it was most appropriate for learning; and encouraging the development of ICT skills for young people and their families (DfES, 2006b). Davis & Good (2009) suggested that learners across the age range regularly use ICT at home, with more recent figures suggesting that 93% of households have access to the internet, including 100% of households with CYP (Office for National Statistics, 2019).

In addition, in terms of access to ICT, there may be some young people for whom online learning may be difficult, including those with physical and sensory impairments as well as cognitive and communication difficulties. Whilst it is not within the scope of this paper to explore these issues, there are ongoing developments in assistive technology which may go some way to supporting young people with such difficulties to access ICT and online learning (Galloway, 2009).

Taking into account the proposals set out in the Children's Plan, Becta carried out a review of the role of ICT in supporting disadvantaged or disaffected young people. The review indicated that several initiatives were employing ICT to support and re-engage disaffected learners by providing an alternative to school, as well as distance learning for traveller families (Becta, 2008).

In 2008, the government white paper *Back on Track* (DCSF, 2008) endeavoured to build on the Children's Plan proposals by setting out a strategy for transforming and modernising AP to support CYP, ensuring that such provision is tailored to the individual child or young person in order to meet their needs. In addition, it highlighted the need for more effective planning and commissioning of services and increased accountability. It defined AP as "education for children and young people who are unable to be provided for in mainstream or in a special school" including "pupils who remain on the school roll, but who need specialist help with learning, behaviour, or other difficulties" (DCSF, 2008, p10). A case study evaluation of 12 *Back on Track* pilot provisions suggested some positive outcomes for CYP including, increased confidence and self-esteem and achieving General Certificates of Education (GCSEs) and equivalents as well as more vocationally based accreditations; however, these were still below the level of CYP in mainstream education (White, Martin & Jeffes, 2012). Key facilitators to the provisions' effectiveness included; learning tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of the individual young person, maintaining high expectations of and for CYP, staff qualities and approaches with an underpinning commitment to building positive relationships, and the

promotion of the provisions' values and ethos through key personnel (White, Martin & Jeffes, 2012). Challenges identified with the research included; ensuring positive progress was sustained when CYP integrated back into mainstream school or progressed to other destinations, issues with the availability, consistency and quality of information shared during the referral process, leading to inappropriate matching of CYP and funding issues (White, Martin & Jeffes, 2012). More recently, *Creating Opportunity for All* (DfE, 2018a) has called for further reform, including to ensure that CYP; receive high quality education and have positive experiences in AP, achieve meaningful outcomes after leaving AP, that AP is recognised as an integral part of the education system, and that the system achieves high quality outcomes for CYP based on a robust evidence base.

It has been estimated that at any one time, around one percent of pupils are in some form of AP, (DCSF, 2008) with almost half of these (47%) being CYP aged 15-16 years of age (Year 11) (DfE, 2018a) and around 77% have an identified special educational need (SEN) (DfE, 2018a). Around 50% have either been excluded from school or are deemed at risk of exclusion. The other 50% include those with medical needs, emotional needs, teenage mothers, or those who may feel unable to cope in school (DCSF, 2008). Some of the issues relating to CYP's absence from school will now be considered.

2.4 School absence

School attendance rates have remained somewhat stable in recent years (Department for Education (DfE), 2019a), with research suggesting that 4.8% of CYP in England were absent from school in 2017/2018, (DfE, 2019a). However, attendance rates at special schools are higher (10.2%) and have been increasing in recent years (DfE, 2019a). Persistent absence from school is currently defined as missing more than 10% (DfE, 2011), a threshold which the Government has lowered from 20% and then from 15%, with the aim of enabling schools to tackle absence sooner. Recent figures suggest the persistent absence rate is 11.2%, with persistent absentees accounting for 38.5% of all absence (DfE, 2019a); more than three times higher than the average rate for all pupils.

Research suggests that absenteeism increases as CYP progress through school, with particular peaks at periods of transition (Pellegrini, 2007) and with the highest rate being in Years 10 and 11 (DfE, 2019a). Whilst persistent absentees represent a small proportion of CYP of school age, regular attendance at school is seen as key in reducing risk factors such as poor educational outcomes, post-school unemployment, and involvement in crime and anti-social behaviours (National Audit Office, 2005). Figures suggest that of those pupils who are absent for more

than 50%, only three percent achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A to C, compared to 73% of pupils who have over 95% attendance at school (Taylor, 2012a).

Factors relating to persistent absenteeism appear highly individualised and complex. A recent paper published by The British Psychological Society (2017) suggests that factors including; emotionally-based (where there are mental health factors affecting the student or their family), physical health related, attitudinal/systemic and school behaviour-related (for example, exclusion, managed moves, alternative provision), or a combination of these, can contribute to persistent absenteeism. Other research considered that a combination of home, school and individual factors can affect CYP's attendance at school (Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2005) including homelessness and poverty, teenage pregnancy, school violence and bullying, school climate and connectedness, parental involvement and family and community factors (Kearney, 2007). In addition, persistent absence has also been associated with mental health issues, medical illness and injury, school phobia and truancy (Kearney, 2007).

School absence itself has also been considered from varying perspectives over the years, predominantly; psychology, social/criminal justice, and education, although child development, family and ethnic studies, law, medicine, and nursing are also documented (Kearney, 2008). It is argued that due to these varying perspectives there has been 'poor comparability across publications, policies and assessment and intervention protocols' (Kearney, 2008, p257).

Since the major approaches to school absence have been through a psychological or social/criminal justice lens, it is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of research into school absence has been concerned with school refusal and truancy. School refusal has been associated with emotional difficulties such as an anxiety around school or separation from home, whereas truancy has been related to behavioural difficulties and a lack of interest and motivation regarding school (Lauchlan, 2003; Pellegrini, 2007). Some of the key reasons young people give for their non-attendance at school include boredom, disaffection with the curriculum, bullying, adverse peer pressure, difficulties with teachers, problems following specific lessons, and social isolation (Malcolm et al., 2003).

A range of psychological intervention to support CYP with school refusal are documented, including cognitive behavioural approaches, social skills training, and parental training (Lauchlan, 2003; Pellegrini, 2007) as well as educational strategies such as organising staff support, offering a flexible part-time timetable, and setting up a peer mentoring system (Pellegrini, 2007). Nuttall and Woods (2013) propose an ecological model and an interaction of

child psychological support, family support, professional and systemic factors to support successful reintegration to school.

Although CYP who truant make up a small proportion of persistent absentees; absenteeism is seen as particularly important in relation to safeguarding and the issues around the activities of unauthorised absentees when not at school (Attwood & Croll, 2006). As well as within school strategies such as those noted above, there are a number of out-of-school provisions to support CYP absent from school including Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), alternative curriculum centres and voluntary sector activities (Reid, 2005) as well as home education (McIntyre-Batty, 2008; Reid, 2005).

Taking into account a medical perspective of school absence, there appear to be few studies which explore medical illness and injury as factors relating to absenteeism (Ikari & Takahashi, 2007). It is suggested that illness is the main driver for overall school absence, accounting for more than 54% in 2017/18 (DfE, 2019a). Absences due to illness are almost four times higher for persistent absentees compared to other pupils (DfE, 2017a). Much of the research around medical factors and school absence relates to chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, cancer and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Figures from the United States of America (USA) indicate that approximately 1.5% of CYP are unable to regularly attend school due to chronic illness (Kaffenberger, 2006). A study across several LAs in England revealed that CFS is responsible for 51% of long-term illness-related absences from school (Dowsett & Colby, 1997). It is estimated that around 45% of CYP with chronic illness often struggle to keep up with their school work (Thies, 1999), which can lead to feelings of stress or depression (Myers, Willse & Villalba, 2011) and a high level of school refusal (Thies & McAllister, 2001). Difficulties with their education can also undermine their motivation and self-esteem (Maslow, Hayden, McRee, Fort & Halpern, 2011). Research suggests that CYP with a chronic illness or physical disability perceive their absence from school to impact on their inclusion in school life and relationships with peers (Lightfoot, Wright & Sloper, 1999). CYP can become socially isolated from peers, friends, and the routines of school and everyday life (Hopkins, Moss, Green & Strong, 2014).

Provision for those CYP with medical needs typically include hospital schools and hospital teaching services, home education or a combination of these. However, the need to provide appropriate educational provision for CYP with chronic illness is becoming more challenging due to developments in medical care which mean that CYP are less likely to spend long periods in hospital but instead receive extended support through outpatient care (Shaw & McCabe, 2008). This has led to an increased emphasis on home and family involvement, including home

tuition, flexible school days, differentiated teaching strategies, and increasing child autonomy (Shaw & McCabe, 2008). CYP recuperating or receiving treatment at home may have less access to hospital schools and yet are not yet well enough to attend their own school (Wilkie, 2011).

The following section will consider alternative education provision as identified within the literature search, which aim to support CYP absent from school.

2.5 Alternative Provision

As noted previously, LAs have been charged with a duty to provide education for CYP not in school since the Education Act (1996). The range and type of alternative provision organised by LAs throughout England is extremely varied in terms of size, scope and purpose (Callander, 2000). The Department for Education (DfE, 2018b) defines alternative provision as education outside school, arranged by local authorities or schools for pupils up to age 18 who do not attend mainstream school for reasons such as exclusion, behaviour issues, school refusal or short or long-term illness. This includes provision directly managed by LAs, PRUs, hospital schools, hospital and home teaching services, tuition centres, e-learning centres and boarding schools; which are sometimes registered as PRUs within their own right, other provision which is arranged by the LA such as Further Education (FE) college placements, extended work experience, and voluntary or private sector projects. AP is provided through full or part-time, and short or longer-term placements (DfE, 2018a). Alternative provision has also previously been used to describe arrangements by schools to offer curriculum flexibility at Key Stage 4 (DCSF, 2005).

In 2008, the then Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) estimated that approximately 135,000 pupils a year, mostly of secondary school age, spent some time in an alternative provision with around 70,000 pupils doing so at any one time. More recently, government statistics recorded 16,134 pupils in PRUs and 26,362 in other alternative provision settings (including independent AP providers and virtual schools) (DfE, 2019b). Almost half (47%) of CYP in AP are in Year 11 (age 15-16) (DfE 2018b). Seventy-nine percent of CYP in AP have a SEN or disability (DfE, 2019b).

Establishing a robust evidence base for the effectiveness of AP including CYP's experiences and outcomes, has proved challenging (DfE, 2017b). Taylor (2012b) suggests that defining good alternative provision is difficult because there is such a variety for such a wide range of needs. Further to this, evaluating outcomes of alternative provision is difficult because it is often very individualised, students may join an alternative provision part way through the year only stay for a short period of time, and not all courses and experiences are accredited (Ofsted, 2011).

Much of the literature to date has focused on CYP who have been excluded or at risk of exclusion and there is a dearth of research around CYP who attend AP for reasons relating to physical or mental health (DfE, 2017b).

An international review of alternative provision revealed that although CYP in such provision have a wide diversity of needs and there is great variation in the scope and purpose of provision, similar practices can achieve positive outcomes for all CYP (Gutherson, Davies, & Daszkiewicz, 2011). Effective practices identified within the review included: flexible and individually tailored programmes of learning; addressing a breadth of needs; based on accurate assessment of need; and caring and knowledgeable specialist staff with continuity of strong relationships. The report also noted that approaches to teaching and learning within alternative provision should take advantage of: out-of-school time strategies; person-centred approaches; and creative and flexible teaching.

A study by Kendall et al., (2003) explored six alternative provisions in England that had demonstrated some success at re-engaging young people with their education. Although each provision represented different approaches to varying levels of disengagement amongst the young people attending, the study also found that the alternative provisions shared a number of similarities in their aims and objectives. These included: a focus on establishing respectful relationships; offering educational programmes which allowed the young person to experience success, and which were supported by a strong pastoral element; a variety and flexibility of educational programmes that were tailored to individual needs; and high staff pupil ratios and small group sizes. Positive outcomes recorded in the study included young people being awarded some form of accreditation (approximately half of the young people attending the six provisions were awarded some form of accreditation, however this was considered noteworthy in relation to previous educational performance); an increase in young people's willingness to learn; and an improvement in behaviour (three-quarters of young people noted an improvement in their behaviour as a result of attending the alternative provision). It should be noted that the six provisions within this study were selected because they were viewed as successful, and they represent a very small sample of alternative provision available across England.

Other research relating to alternative provision suggests less positive results. Reid (2007) found that attendance rates in PRUs across England suggested that unauthorized absence rates were ten times higher in PRUs than those reported for primary and secondary schools. In addition, it is suggested that CYP who leave AP at 16 years of age (Key Stage 4) experience less successful outcomes in terms of educational attainment and post-school transition, than their peers in mainstream school (DfE 2019b). Only four and a half percent of CYP attending AP

achieved Grades nine-four passes in English and Mathematics at GCSE compared to 65% in state-funded mainstream schools (DfE 2018b).

APs do not have to teach the full national curriculum but statutory guidance states that the curriculum should enable CYP to achieve “good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers” (DfE, 2013a), particularly in English, Mathematics and Science (including Information Technology). It also states that the personal, social, and academic needs of CYP should be appropriately identified and met (DfE, 2013a).

With the aim of building on the evidence base for AP and continuing to ensure the quality of education and safeguarding (DfE, 2018b), several studies and evaluations have been carried out in recent years (DfE, 2018a). A recent large-scale investigative study highlighted several factors which contribute to the effectiveness of AP processes. These included:

- full information about the circumstances of the referral to AP being shared from the outset (including CYP’s background, prior attainment, any SEND identified, and parents/carers and school remaining closely involved),
- inductions and taster visits for CYP and their parents/carers,
- small class sizes, a high teacher to pupil ratio and more personalised support including 1:1 tuition and pastoral support,
- CYP’s progress being closely monitored and regularly shared with parents/carers, (DfE, 2018b).

The report also highlighted several areas for improvement including; information for parents/carers throughout the process of moving to AP and in terms of post-school pathways, more effective partnership working to support transitions into and out of AP, and the need for longitudinal data regarding CYP leaving AP in order to address ongoing support needs and evaluate post-16 transitions. (DfE, 2018b).

Perceived issues with the curriculum for young people absent from school have been highlighted in research around truancy and disaffection. In a survey of truancy, O’Keefe (1994) suggested that the curriculum is one of the main causes of disaffection. Pupils reported that they did not want to attend classes in subjects which they did not like, considered boring, or which they felt were stressful and difficult. A more recent review also argued that some CYP who truant perceive the curriculum and GCSEs as inappropriate or lacking relevance (Cullen, Fletcher-Campbell, Bowen, Osgood, & Kelleher, 2000).

In response to such research evidence and in line with government plans to increase curriculum flexibility at Key Stage 4, a number of alternative curricula have been implemented

at secondary school level in order to promote attendance and re-engagement with learning (Cullen et al., 2000; Rogers, Hallam, Shaw, & Rhamie, 2009). These have included changes to the mode of study, the content of the curriculum, the nature of assessment and the teaching and learning context (Rogers et al., 2009). Cullen et al. (2000) identified three main types of alternative curriculum: satellite programmes where separate provision is made for a group of identified pupils with problems, with little relationship to, or impact on the traditional curriculum; extension programmes where individualised approaches are developed to compensate for perceived weaknesses in the breadth of content or style of delivery of the traditional curriculum; and complementary programmes which provide an opportunity for all Key Stage 4 pupils to follow externally provided, vocationally oriented options that cannot be offered as part of the traditional curriculum.

One alternative curriculum which started as a satellite programme and became a complementary programme has been explored from the varying perspectives of those involved. 'Skill Force' is sponsored by the Ministry of Defence and offers a key skills-based vocational alternative to the traditional curriculum (Hallam, et al., 2007). Its core programme offers a wide range of activities which focus on team building, problem solving and raising self-esteem. Pupils' views of Skill Force suggested that the programme was successful in meeting their needs, including improving motivation, attendance, confidence, communication, and social skills (Hallam et al., 2007). Findings also suggested that the programme was successful in reducing exclusions, improving behaviour, attendance and attitudes towards education and attainment, and providing students with a range of practical vocational qualifications. Skill Force staff perceived the programme to be successful in helping young people who had become disaffected to re-engage with learning and in providing clear progression routes to post-16 education, training, or employment (Hallam, Rogers & Rhamie, 2010). Factors of the provision which were seen to be key to its success included: effective introduction of the programme to pupils and parents; careful selection of students; clear introduction of the programme to staff; integrated discipline policies; strong support from senior management; good communication and a willingness to resolve practical difficulties (Rogers et al., 2009).

Whilst there is clearly a place for alternative curricula in supporting CYP who have become disaffected from education due to perceived issues with the curriculum, research regarding truancy and non-attendance have also argued that there is little evidence to support the claim that disaffection is the result of perceived curricular issues (Attwood & Croll, 2006; Solomon & Rogers, 2001). Indeed, Solomon and Rogers, (2001) argue that it may be more reflective of a deficiency in motivational and coping strategies rather than curricular issues. Considering the

broader context of school absence as discussed above, responses to the traditional curriculum are among many factors which may impact on a young person's attendance.

2.6 Online provision

It is argued that the use of ICT to aid learning has been a developing aspect of many types of provision over recent years (Gutherson et al., 2011) and is an emerging trend around the world (Oliver, Osborne, & Brady, 2009; Roblyer, 2008). Within the USA online learning programmes have increased over the years; with more than one million students being enrolled in some form of online provision in 2008 (Picciano & Seaman, 2009) and more than 2 million in 2013-14 (Gemin, Pape, Vashaw & Watson, 2015). A small study exploring young people's attitudes towards virtual learning in one virtual school in the USA suggested young people felt that the benefits included; flexibility with location and time of day, access to learning and courses, and individualised pace and coursework. Disadvantages included; teacher access and willingness, difficulty with collaboration, and the need for more self-motivation (Pleau, 2012).

Virtual learning provisions (VLPs) are emerging in other countries too, including Australia, Canada, Finland, the UK (Roblyer, 2008), and Belgium (Zhu & Winkel, 2015). Within the UK, following plans set out within Back on Track (DCSF, 2008) to develop a greater variety of alternative provision and in line with their earlier e-strategy, the government launched a national database of alternative providers in 2008, which currently includes several virtual or online provisions amongst other alternative provisions. However, following the Taylor review (2012b) this resource ceased to exist as it was argued that alternative provision and information relating to its quality and effectiveness should be managed within the local context rather than centrally.

It is argued that online learning offers pupils a more individualised and differentiated learning experience than can perhaps be provided in a regular classroom, where students are able to work at a pace consistent with their rate of learning; have more time to reflect; have more control over their learning experience; and engage in more self-directed and independent learning (Thomson, 2010).

However, whilst there appears to be a growing number of provisions employing ICT, both within the UK and across other countries, there is a lack of a significant evidence base underpinning its use and effectiveness (Gutherson et al., 2011). An international review carried out by Gutherson et al. (2011) explored the ways in which ICT can contribute to effective alternative provision. These included using ICT to support creativity, using ICT to support young people aged 16-18 years of age who are 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET), providing CYP with personal computers and internet access at home to promote

engagement and learning, and using virtual learning environments (VLEs) to re-engage CYP back into the learning process. In relation to digital creativity, a study commissioned by Becta (the former government agency concerned with the use of effective and innovative technology to support learning) found that the creative use of ICT (including creating videos, DVDs and stop frame animation) had a positive impact on pupil motivation and engagement, control and autonomy of learning, raising aspirations, social relationships and collaboration, literacy, personal reflection, and developing insight (Russell & McGuigan, 2007).

One of the VLEs explored within the review was Notschool.net, which was set up to offer an alternative provision to traditional education for young people who are unable to attend school, or other complementary provisions such as home tutoring or specialist units (Duckworth, 2005). These included young people who are unable to attend school due to illness, pregnancy, bullying, phobia, travelling, reluctance to learn, disaffection, exclusion, or statementing (Duckworth, 2005). Research showed clear gains for the young people involved in the study, with the most significant gains being for those CYP who were phobic or ill (Gutherson et al., 2011). Issues affecting Notschool.net which were highlighted in the review included: 'mentors' who are qualified teachers, need to be computer competent; the provision does not work in seriously dysfunctional families where there is no support from an adult or carer; and the provision is not appropriate for CYP whose homes or families provide a temporary, transient or unsuitable environment.

Another VLE which was set up to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school was Accipio, which provided online education courses in core GCSE subjects and work-related learning, including English, Maths, Science, ICT, History, Preparation for Working Life and Enterprise and Employability. As well as live real time lessons, Accipio provided access to a comprehensive library of recorded lessons which students could use at any time. An evaluation of Accipio (Tyldesley, 2011), which was based on a small convenience sample of six students using the VLE, identified facilitators and barriers to the effectiveness of the provision. Facilitators included a secure environment in which to learn, the ability to adapt learning to the students' needs and the ability to access the library of recorded lessons which was described as a useful resource for students. The barriers identified included: issues with ICT and connectivity; the need for more training for school staff; and limited interaction with peers.

The literature search carried out for the current review (as described above) revealed eight peer-reviewed studies; seven which highlight specific alternative provisions which have employed ICT to support CYP absent from school and one systematic literature review. Cook

(2005) explored a 'Virtual College' set up as an alternative provision which attempted to re-engage young people in Key Stage 4 (KS4) who had become disconnected from education. The project employed a VLE alongside other learning opportunities (including work experience, sport activities and residential) to deliver the Award Scheme and Accreditation Network Youth Award Scheme (ASDAN, n.d.). Findings suggested that successful factors of the provision included a curriculum tailored to the skills and interests of the students, which included opportunities for developing social skills in a non-threatening environment and which made use of information technology (Cook, 2005).

Further research explored online provisions set up to support CYP who are experiencing challenges to attending school due to chronic illness. It is argued that the use of ICT may assist young people with chronic illness to maintain contact with their schools and peers whilst absent from school and may also assist communication between education and health professionals who work to support CYP and their families during periods of school absence (Morgan, 2004; Newman, 2002). A study by St Leger and Campbell, (2008) evaluated a programme in its early stages of development, which made use of a range of ICT and other communication strategies to support pupils with cancer to maintain contact with their school and peers during prolonged absence. 'Back on Track' was developed in Australia as an alternative model to hospital schools and was delivered by The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Education Institute. The programme focused on promoting communication between Back on Track staff, hospital staff, school staff and the young person and their family to provide educational and social support to the CYP. ICT strategies included a virtual classroom, student portal websites, video conferencing, email, instant messaging, and chat room programmes. Findings suggested that the use of ICT had limited success due to difficulties with access to computers, internet connection problems, set up delays, a lack of adequate reliable ICT support and a lack of familiarity with the internet/computer programmes resulting in an inability to support some young people to use the programmes. Teachers involved in the programme highlighted additional workload issues relating to the use of ICT with a third of them expressing dissatisfaction with the virtual classroom as a teaching tool. School, family, and student participants emphasised that interpersonal connections such as face-to-face and phone contact with each other were important for sharing information and maintaining the relationship between home and school (St Leger & Campbell, 2008). Building on this research, Wilkie (2011; 2014) explored further projects delivered by The RCH Education Institute in Australia, which employed ICT to support learning in mathematics for young people who were absent from school due to chronic illness. In the first study, pupils reported that independent study using a textbook or website meant that they missed out on access to 'live' teaching and

learning interactions which they valued to support their learning (Wilkie, 2011). The more recent study focused on the interaction between students and their teachers to achieve continuity of their learning in mathematics. Facilitators to this included the CYP's ambition and perseverance with independent learning and their initiative in seeking help, teachers' willingness to use ICT and their ability to adapt their students' learning programme, a responsive school technology department, technology tutoring, and the involvement of family members (Wilkie, 2014).

Two recent studies from Belgium have also evaluated both an ICT tool; 'Bednet' (Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015) and a VLE (Zhu & Van Winkel, 2016) to support young people absent from school due to long-term illness. 'Bednet' is described as "a two-way real time audio and video connection over the World Wide Web" (Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015, p233). In the second study, the VLE provided facilities such as a virtual blackboard, virtual bookshelf (enabling pictures and documents to be shared), webcam and live chat (Zhu & Van Winkel, 2016). Both studies suggested that the provision being explored helped CYP to keep up to date with their schoolwork and maintain contact with their peers and teachers; findings which were echoed in a recent Australian study exploring the use of mobile technologies for CYP in hospital (Maor & Mitchem, 2018). The provisions also helped to reduce CYP's feelings of isolation and enabled them to feel more confident about reintegrating to school and about their future (Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015, 2016).

Recurrent issues raised within the research relating to online provision have included technical issues and lack of familiarity with the technology (St Leger & Campbell, 2008; Tyldesley, 2011; Wilkie, 2014). It is argued that further investigation of technologies is needed to overcome these barriers (Maor & Mitchem, 2015) as well as the need for further training and support with ICT for teachers and users (Voogt et al., 2013; Wilkie, 2014). Limitations noted from the studies have included small sample sizes and access to participants, given the sensitive nature of carrying out research with CYP experiencing ill-health (Maor & Mitchem, 2015; Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015).

Giving consideration to the studies highlighted from the literature search, there appears to be limited evidence of the effectiveness of ICT and online learning within alternative provision (Gutherson et al., 2011; Maor & Mitchem, 2015; St Leger and Campbell, 2008; Wilkie, 2011). Similar to other provisions, and as highlighted above, online provision may not be suitable for all learners (Galloway, 2009; Gutherson et al., 2011). However, research suggests that ICT as an alternative provision may have a positive impact on, motivation and engagement; control and autonomy of learning; raising aspirations; social relationships and collaboration; literacy; personal reflection and parental/family involvement (Gutherson et al., 2011). Indeed, there is

an expectation that VLPs will form a significant part of the next generation's experience of learning (Gutherson et al., 2011).

2.7 Summary of literature review

The literature review presented here began by considering the legislative context which surrounds the current study. CYP's right to receive an education suitable to their needs, interests and abilities has been reflected in both UK and international legislation since the 1990s. More recently the ECM agenda (DfES, 2004) called for reform in improving outcomes for children, including being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being. As part of a renewed focus on improving outcomes for CYP, the government set out plans to develop a greater variety of AP to support young people with a range of needs, who are excluded from school, unable to attend mainstream school or who have become disengaged with education. More recently, their aim is to ensure high quality outcomes for CYP in AP including achieving meaningful outcomes after leaving AP, and that AP becomes an integral part of the education system (DfE, 2018a).

Alongside these developments, the government also recognised the potential of emerging ICT in supporting their plans to promote integrated children's services and as a tool to transform teaching and learning, providing more motivating ways of learning and more choice about how and when to learn.

Further to this, the current review considered the complex factors associated with school absence and the impact this can have on young people and their learning. Much of the research has considered school absence through a psychological and social/criminal justice lens, exploring truancy and school phobia, however consideration was also given to illness related absence and the typical provisions which may be available to such young people who are absent from school.

Finally, the review considered research around alternative provision, which suggested that although there is a wide variety of alternative provision available across LAs in England, evaluating their effectiveness and outcomes has proved difficult due to the variety of provisions and needs which they cater for. Research identified within this review demonstrated mixed results in terms of outcome, however; where alternative provisions have been successful, similar practices have been identified across provisions that have achieved positive outcomes. Studies relating to alternative curricula set up to provide a skills-based alternative to the traditional curriculum were explored, as were those which aim to provide an alternative medium of delivery learning using ICT and online provisions. Issues relating to the use of ICT in alternative provisions were highlighted in a study from the UK relating to a

'Virtual College' set up to support young people who had become disaffected; and six studies from Europe and Australia which used ICT as part of a wider provision to support young people absent from school due to chronic illness.

2.8 Distinctive contribution

Despite a growing number of alternative provisions employing online learning within the UK and across the world, there is a paucity of research which underpins its use and effectiveness (Gutherson et al., 2011). The studies identified through the literature search provided valuable insights into some of the issues relating to the use of ICT and online provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school, however, within several of the studies the use of ICT was only one component of the provision described (Cook, 2005; St Leger & Campbell, 2008 and Wilkie, 2011). In addition, all the studies considered provisions set up for specific categories of young people; those who had become disaffected (Cook, 2005) and those who were absent from school due to chronic illness (Maor & Mitchem, 2018; St Leger & Campbell, 2008; Wilkie, 2011; Wilkie 2014; Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015; Zhu & Van Winkel, 2016). The latter studies were also set within the Australian and Belgian contexts and aimed to explore emerging issues relating to newly developed provisions, with the online component being delivered by mainstream teachers from the pupil's host school. The current study aims to build on this limited evidence base by exploring the effectiveness of an established VLP; Innovate² in delivering learning to young people across England who are absent from school for a variety of reasons. It aims to explore the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting the learning, academic and general progress of young people. Since the views of CYP are key in understanding and evaluating the mechanisms which aim to support them (in this case Innovate), this study aims to seek the views of the young people, parents/carers, other key stakeholders regarding how Innovate might support young people and their learning. It aims to explore the following two research questions:

RQ1. How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?

RQ2. What are the perceived facilitators/barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate?

Virtual learning provisions appear to be an emerging resource providing personalised learning to a number of young people absent from school for a variety of reasons, enabling them to progress towards achieving their potential, feel confident and successfully transition to adulthood and post-school opportunities (SEND Code of Practice, 2015). With a paucity of

² Name has been changed to ensure anonymity.

research exploring the effectiveness of such provisions, this study aims to contribute to this evidence base, providing the young people involved with an opportunity to make a positive contribution by sharing their experiences of how effective Innovate is in supporting them and their learning. It is hoped that the findings of the current study will also support future development of the provision in supporting young people experiencing challenges to attending school. As educational psychologists may typically be involved with CYP who experience challenges affecting their attendance, learning and development and are concerned with improving outcomes for such young people, it is hoped that the current research will also provide insight into online learning as a potential intervention to support CYP absent from school, including factors which may facilitate or inhibit success. Within their role, EPs may be able to provide valuable information about a young person's strengths and needs and how they might be best supported to use an online medium to support their learning whilst absent from school. Through their knowledge of psychological theory and evidence-based practice in promoting the wellbeing of CYP, EPs may also be best placed to work with online providers to explore how psychological approaches such as solution focused group work (see Small & Smith, 2010), might best be adapted for an online environment, to support early intervention and prevention work with CYP.

3 Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents a critical discussion of the methodology used to answer the research questions. The rationale for the research is presented, followed by the philosophical approaches underpinning the methodology; specifically, the epistemological, ontological, and axiological stances of the researcher. The design of the study is then presented followed by a critical discussion of the design and the sampling and participant recruitment. Data collection and analysis are critically reviewed followed by an analysis of factors affecting the reliability and validity of the study. Finally, ethical considerations are discussed.

3.2 Rationale

This study arose from the researcher's professional interest in how young people can best be supported to continue with their learning whilst experiencing challenges to attending school and following previous involvement in a study exploring virtual learning carried out with a university tutor. A limited evidence base relating to the use and effectiveness of virtual learning as an alternative provision for young people experiencing challenges to attending school highlighted the need for further exploration of this area.

The study will explore Innovate; a virtual learning provision utilised within several local authorities in England, which aims to support young people who are experiencing challenges to attending school and who are experiencing barriers to their learning. These include young people who; are unable to access education for medical reasons, are excluded or those at risk of exclusion, exhibit emotional or behavioural issues, are Looked After or children in care, are school phobic, school refusers or bullied students, are from a travelling community or have a career which impacts on their ability to attend school full time, for example, young actors/actresses and sportsmen/women.

The study explores the following research questions:

1. How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?
2. What are the perceived facilitators/barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate?

3.3 Ontological and Epistemological position

Research is inevitably influenced by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher, depending on their philosophical positions relating to these. Each are linked and

will have implications for the researcher's methodological approach and the research methods used.

Ontology is concerned with assumptions about the nature of the world, what exists, and the phenomenon being explored. The researcher's position (defined here as the basic belief system that guides them) makes assumptions about what kind of things do or can exist, the conditions of their existence and the way they are related (Blaikie, 2004). Epistemology is concerned with assumptions about the theory of knowledge; how we know what we know. These relate to the nature and forms of knowledge, its limitations, how we can acquire it and how it can be communicated to others (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The researcher's epistemological position will influence what kinds of knowledge they believe are possible and how knowledge can be judged to be adequate and valid, including the consideration of the research methods and procedures to be used (Blaikie, 2004). Crotty (1998) argues that because particular assumptions about what constitutes social phenomena have implications about the ways in which it is possible to gain information about it, it is difficult to discuss ontology and epistemology separately.

3.3.1 Positivism and Relativism

Positivism and relativism may be considered as two contrasting positions, although relativism may be considered more of a meta-position rather than a unitary one. A positivist ontology assumes that the world and phenomena within it are real and exist independently of our experience (a fundamental assumption of realism). A positivist epistemology assumes that; truth and objective knowledge about the world can be investigated objectively through direct experience or observation, that phenomena can be understood by analysis of their component parts (reductionist), and that it is possible to find universal laws and knowledge that are generalizable (Coe, 2012). Historically the gathering and analysis of quantitative data has been closely linked to positivism (Robson, 2011).

In contrast, a relativist ontology assumes that there is no universal truth nor any objective knowledge. A relativist epistemology assumes that; knowledge is subjective and only understood in relation to the individual's own socio-historic and cultural context, that social phenomena are more than the sum of their parts and can be understood holistically, and that research should aim to understand individual causes and situations and focus on the meaning that different participants bring to them (Coe, 2012).

Both positions have received some criticism. Cohen et al. (2007) argue that positivism, in its pursuit of objectivity, fails to take into account the "complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomenon" (p. 11). Because the social world and the

phenomena within it are viewed as external to the individual rather than interactive and relating to experience, the role of researcher and participant are passive and depersonalised. Participants' unique and individual ability to interpret their own experiences and represent these through their thoughts, ideas, and perspectives, fail to be acknowledged. The researcher is viewed as an observer of the social world who analyses and interprets it, rather than one who interacts with it. Chamberlain (2015) argues that as human beings we are constantly interacting and engaging with our world, with purpose, and therefore we cannot be regarded as independent of it.

This is an argument which can be seen as congruent with relativism (and closely associated social constructionism), where researcher and participants play an active role; bringing their own meaning to the researched world (Coe, 2012). Within a relativist or constructionist epistemology, knowledge and meaning about the social world can only be constructed by individuals within their unique personal contexts, therefore multiple viewpoints are all considered equally valid, some of which may be incommensurate with one another (Gomm, 2009). It is argued that if all viewpoints are considered to be true and equally valid, then they cannot be measured against one another or against 'reality' (Burr, 2003). As such, traditional scientific methods used to generate knowledge about the social world are avoided (Wallach & Wallach, 2001). Indeed, relativism has been described as being "divorced from science" (Robson, 2002, p. 42).

3.3.2 Critical Realism

The current research adopted a critical realist position which Chamberlain (2015) suggests "can be understood as assuming an ontological reality, although one that can only be known imperfectly through our sensory capacities as social beings" (p. 22). Critical realism (from realism) both accepts and rejects some of the assumptions of the two contrasting positions described above, providing a third position between them (Robson, 2011).

Bhasker; a pioneer of critical realism makes a clear distinction between the intransitive (relating to ontology) and the transitive (relating to epistemology) dimensions of knowledge (Bhasker, 1975). Intransitive objects of knowledge relate to what is 'real', for example the physical processes or social phenomena that exist independently of our knowledge of them. Transitive objects of knowledge relate to socially produced concepts and the methods through which they are attempted to be understood (Benton, 2004). Reality is viewed as an open, complex system where other conditions and mechanisms exist (as opposed to a closed, controlled system). This lends itself well to research which takes place in the 'real world'; open and uncontrolled, rather than in the laboratory (Robson, 2011). Bhasker (1975, 1978, 1989)

argues that reality is stratified, consisting of three different layers: the real, the actual and the empirical. The real is described as whatever exists, whether natural or social; it includes objects and their mechanisms (their capacities to behave in particular ways as well as their susceptibilities to change) (Sayer, 2000). For example, objects can include organisations, people, relationships, and ideas (Easton, 2010). The actual is defined as events or outcomes that are generated by the mechanisms (for example human behaviour), and the empirical as events that are observed and experienced (Sayer, 2000; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). Researchers adopting a critical realist position accept that there is a single reality, but also that we do not necessarily have immediate access to it, nor have the ability to observe every aspect of it (Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013).

Bhasker (1978) argues that having a stratified ontology has implications for epistemology. Critical realists accept that knowledge is a social and historical product; but argue that the world is construed rather than constructed; “reality kicks in at some point” (Easton, 2010, p. 122). Sayer (2000) argues that “social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful, and hence that meaning is not only externally descriptive of them but constitutive of them” (p. 17). Our observations and experiences of the world as defined in the empirical domain constitute a layer of reality but are not contingent upon what is ‘real’, as it exists independently of our perceptions of it. Because our observations and experiences of the world are dependent on our ideas about it, knowledge is therefore ‘theory-laden’, imperfect and not beyond dispute (Robson, 2011). It is argued that knowledge and meaning about the world needs to be interpreted and understood, rather than measured (Sayer, 2000).

Researchers adopting a critical realist position aim to identify and understand underlying causal mechanisms (for example, structures, powers) that explain how things work beyond what is observed (McEvoy & Richards, 2003), including the specific contexts within which the mechanisms operate (Robson, 2002). Critical realism allows the researcher to ask ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. It is suggested that critical realism is compatible with a variety of research methods (Sayer, 2000), including mixed methods. Kelly (2008) argues the relevance of critical realism for educational psychology is that it provides a framework “for analysing and acting in the complexity of social and educational contexts” (p. 25). In relation to this study, adopting a critical realist perspective will support the researcher in attempting to understand how Innovate works best, for whom and under what circumstances (from Robson, 2002, p39).

3.4 Axiology

Together with ontological and epistemological positions, the researcher’s axiological position is fundamental to the research process and should be made transparent. Axiology is concerned

with the philosophy of values; in particular, researcher values within the research process (Ponterotto, 2005). Axiology is important in understanding the choices and decisions made by the researcher, including research design and interpretation of data, and has implications for the ethical context of the research (Hiles, 2008). Where positivists claim that there is no place for consideration of values within the research process, critical realists argue that research is value-laden (Robson, 2002).

Assuming a critical realist position, the researcher believes that Innovate exists independently of participants' perceptions of it, but also that understanding participant's views are key to understanding how Innovate works for them and under what circumstances. The researcher in this case is also a trainee educational psychologist and therefore their axiological position is closely related to the beliefs and values they hold as a practitioner. These include the 'child at the centre' including CYP's right to express their views and have these listened to and taken into account. The researcher believes that all people are valuable, are 'experts' in their own lives, and have a valuable and valid contribution to make. All participant contributions within the current research are valued as such, however the researcher believes that young people's views are both essential and central to understanding how Innovate works for them.

In line with legislation as noted above, the researcher believes in children and young people's rights to an education which takes into account their individual strengths, interests, abilities and learning needs as well as their unique circumstances. Learning is valuable and worthwhile and should best meet the strengths and needs of the child. The researcher values the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and considers that learning and development are not only related to the child or young person's individual characteristics, but also to the interactions between them and their wider environment, including home, school and community. The researcher believes that at times adaptations need to be made within the young person's learning environment, or indeed an alternative environment provided, to best support their learning and wellbeing.

As a practitioner, the researcher has worked with a number of children and young people who have experienced challenges relating to their attendance at a mainstream school setting due to a variety of factors, including social and emotional difficulties, anxiety, autism and ill health. The researcher believes that dependent on individual circumstances at the time, full time attendance at mainstream school has not been in the best interests of the child or young person's learning or wellbeing. It is acknowledged that the researcher's experience as a practitioner will have influenced their beliefs and values relating to this research.

3.5 Design of the study

An embedded single case study design employing mixed methods approaches was chosen to answer the research questions. Employing a case study design facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009), whilst using mixed methods can allow the researcher to investigate more complex research questions and enable a richer array of data to be collected (Yin, 2009).

3.5.1 Case study design

Easton (2010) suggests that critical realism is well suited to a case study approach exploring complex phenomena. It is suggested that case study methodology has a distinct advantage over other methodology when a “how” or “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the researcher has little or no control (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2014, p. 16) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”. He adds that as a methodology it:

- *cope with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result,*
- *relies on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result,*
- *benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis* (Yin, 2014, p. 17).

3.5.1.2 Mixed methods approach

Mixed methods research has received some criticism because it is argued that quantitative and qualitative research are each associated with different paradigms and therefore cannot be combined (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002). However, it is also argued that the ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical realism (as described above) lend themselves well to a mixed methods approach (Lipscomb, 2008; McEvoy & Richards, 2006) and enable both quantitative and qualitative methods to be used within the same study (Robson, 2011). Where quantitative methods can help to develop reliable descriptions or identify patterns which may otherwise be hidden; qualitative methods can help to illuminate complex relationships which may not be captured by quantitative methods (McEvoy & Richards, 2006). Easton (2010) suggests that because critical realists accept differences between the layers of reality (real, actual and empirical), that data can be gathered from people, as well as from and about material things. The potential benefits of employing a mixed methods approach include the

ability to deal with complex real world phenomena (Robson, 2011), triangulation; where the corroboration of quantitative and qualitative data can increase the reliability and validity of findings (McEvoy & Richards, 2006; Zachariadis et al., 2013), and completeness; where combining approaches enables a more complete and comprehensive picture of the phenomena being explored than a single source of data on its own could support (McEvoy & Richards, 2006; Robson, 2011; Zachariadis et al., 2013). It is argued that the rationale for carrying out mixed methods research should be made explicit and should be led by the research questions (Robson, 2011). In the current study, quantitative methods were employed to address research question one and to explore possible patterns within the data for the population of young people enrolled with Innovate. These were intended to complement qualitative methods which were used to gather and analyse the main source of data for the study (participant's views) and to address both research questions in exploring how and why (or why not) Innovate is effective in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school. These methods are further explored throughout this section. Innovate the case will now be presented, followed by discussion regarding the five components which Yin (2009) suggests are particularly important to case study design; a study's questions, its propositions, its units of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings.

3.5.1.3 The case: Innovate

The researcher initially intended to carry out the research with Connect³ a VLP with which there was an established link to the university through research carried out by one of the researcher's tutors. However due to circumstances outwith the researcher's control, this was not possible. To identify an alternative research site, the researcher carried out an online search of VLPs which revealed four other provisions operating in England. Each of these virtual learning providers was contacted by the researcher to request their participation in the study. Innovate was selected by the researcher as they were the first of two provisions to offer their participation. As there was a very small number of online provisions in operation at the time (August 2011), the researcher chose to anonymise the provision using a pseudonym. When seeking informed consent, participants were assured that all information and results would be made anonymous, so they would be unidentifiable. This included Innovate staff; a small team of around 14 teachers, as well as management staff.

³ Name has been changed to ensure anonymity.

To build up a picture of Innovate as the case, information was gathered from several sources of data. These included documentation; email correspondence between the researcher and Innovate managers, researcher's notes of meetings with Innovate managers, information available on Innovate's public website including a learning brochure and case studies document, and a student results analysis PowerPoint presentation for the school year 2011-2012 provided by the Chief Operations Manager, as well as a site visit which included observation of a live lesson. Yin (2009) suggests that observations can prove invaluable for understanding the phenomenon being studied and the use of documentation is key to building on and corroborating information from other sources. The researcher acknowledges that the documents provided by Innovate were very useful in building a more comprehensive picture of the VLP, however, they were produced outside the research context and are likely to reflect biases relating to the purpose of the document (Robson, 2011) and of the author, and should be used and analysed cautiously (Yin, 2009).

Innovate is a VLP available across more than 55 LAs in England. It aims to support young people with their learning, including those who are absent from school due to medical reasons; those who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion; young people with emotional or behavioural issues; looked after children or children in care; school aged mothers; school refusers; young people who are anxious or who have been bullied; and young people from travelling communities. This reflects a broader population than those VLPs identified in the systematic literature review (Maor & Mitchem, 2015), which focused specifically on young people with medical needs who were in hospital. Furthermore, VLPs identified in the literature review were connected to the CYP's own school and employed digital technologies to connect hospitalised CYP to their own classrooms, teachers, and peers, or to other hospitalised CYP, rather than a broader community of online learners. The purpose of most of the fourteen VLPs identified in the literature review was to facilitate social connection with peers, and for those connecting with other medically ill peers, a support network. Only two of the studies specifically mention using digital technologies to meet educational needs/academic outcomes, including Bednet (Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015) as described in the current study's literature review regarding online provision.

Innovate is an independent, privately-owned provision which is purchased by the LA, school, or other organisation responsible for the young person's education (for example a unit for children who are looked after). Its first enrolment was in 2005 and at the time of this study (school year 2012-2013) it had approximately 480 young people enrolled. The Innovate database provided categories of need for 340 students carrying out their learning with the provision in April 2013; a breakdown of the numbers and percentages of these are illustrated

in table 3.1. Young people can join Innovate at any point in the year and for as long as is needed. Periods during which young people are enrolled vary between two weeks and two years.

Table 3.1: Numbers and percentages of students enrolled across the categories of need

Category of Need	Count	Percentage
Medically Ill	112	33%
School Refuser / Disaffected	65	19.1%
Learning Difficulties (including Autism)	41	12%
Emotional Behavioral Difficulties (EBD)	40	11.8%
Excluded	36	10.6%
Bullied	18	5.3%
Additional Support (revision or booster)	15	4.4%
In Care / Looked After	7	2%
Disabled	3	0.9%
Pregnant / SAM	2	0.6%
Traveller	1	0.3%
Total	340	100%

Innovate uses an online learning medium to deliver learning to young people through a combination of synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (self-paced) activities to encourage collaborative and independent learning. Young people can access Innovate from any location with access to the internet, for example, home, school, hospital, care home, or other study centre. Once a young person is enrolled, an initial assessment is carried out to identify their strengths, goals, and areas of development, and to develop a learning programme which meets their needs. They are then able to enter their own personal workspace where they can join lessons, view assignments and access information relating to their learning and courses.

Innovate offers a variety of courses ranging from KS3 (English, Geography, Maths, French, Science, German, ICT, Spanish, and History) to KS5 (A levels in English Literature, English Language, Maths, ICT, Sociology, Business Studies, and Media Studies) as well as vocational and well-being programmes. Young people's progress is monitored by Innovate staff on a regular basis.

Classes are live and interactive and last approximately 30 minutes. They are delivered by qualified teachers who have received additional training in the use of the online technologies

developed by Innovate. Classes are differentiated by ability rather than age, enabling young people to learn at a pace which suits their needs. Young people are also able to access recordings of lessons at any time.

Young people participate in one-to-one activities and small group work and have access to secure personalised workspaces, safe social networking, forums and blogs for peer-to-peer interaction, an e-portfolio to encourage lifelong learning, as well as an online well-being centre which provides specialist support and advice. Innovate aims to work in partnership with schools, local authorities, and support organisations to ensure young people can access local face-to-face support and to support reintegration into mainstream learning where possible.

Initial research around Innovate presented at a conference in 2010 suggested that it has helped to improve learning outcomes for young people with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) (Small & Colby, 2010). Feedback from stakeholders including a young person who had used the VLP, a parent and a staff member from Children's Services suggested that the VLP provided: an ease of access which allowed students who were ill with CFS to manage their illness and to live within the boundaries of their energy; opportunities to attend classes and interact in group discussions, helping to reduce the sense of isolation; opportunities to gain confidence and catch up to a level where reintegration to mainstream education is possible; and opportunities to engage with the teacher in 'real time' when studying from home. In addition, as part of the well-being programme offered by Innovate, a further study (Small & Smith, 2010) considered how evidence-based intervention approaches such as solution-focused group work, might be reconstructed online in order to support early intervention and prevention work around young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

During a site visit to the Innovate office on 30.04.12, the researcher and their supervisor carried out a direct observation of a thirty-minute 'real time' history lesson conducted by a teacher through the VLP. The purpose of the observation was to provide further context around Innovate, to experience the VLP in action, and to gain further insight into how it worked in relation to teaching and learning, for example operational aspects, lesson delivery and online communication and interaction.

The observation was carried out at the early stages of data collection and took place at the Innovate office in the North of England; one of the locations from which the provision is delivered. As such the observation could be described as naturalistic and enabled the researcher to gather data "closely reflecting the natural context" (McKechnie, 2008, p. 551). Data were recorded by the researcher using notes taken throughout the observation. The researcher and supervisor were careful not to distract or disturb the teacher, so no dialogue

took place until the end of the lesson when the researcher and supervisor thanked the teacher for allowing them to observe. The observation was unstructured in that the researcher had some general ideas regarding how the VLP worked but did not know what would specifically be observed (McKechnie, 2008). It is argued that this type of observation lends itself well to exploring complex phenomena which would not as easily be explored through more structured or scientific methods (McKechnie, 2008) and that it enables the researcher to perceive reality from the view of the participant which can be invaluable in understanding a case study phenomenon (Yin, 2009). However, it can also be susceptible to biases for example observer bias where the researcher's values and expectations may have led them to place more significance on some aspects of the observation over others, or where the researcher associated meaning to aspects of the observation which the participant, in this case the teacher, did not (Lockyer, 2008). The researcher aimed to reduce potential biases by having their supervisor as an additional observer and using multiple data sources which enable findings to be cross-checked (Lockyer, 2008).

The observation provided insight into the physical teaching environment; a large open plan office with approximately 14 teaching staff, where each teacher has their own workstation. Each of the workstations were partitioned, and included a desk with computer and screens, keyboard, mouse, and headset with microphone. The general office environment appeared modern, clean, and tidy. The ambiance suggested it was a relaxed yet busy environment, with almost all teachers situated at their desks and delivering live lessons simultaneously at the time of observation. The history teacher was friendly and approachable and allowed the researcher and their supervisor to join her at her workstation. On the main computer screen, the researcher could view the teacher's online classroom, with sections of the screen apportioned to 'attendees', 'feedback', 'chat' with both a public and private tab, and an interactive whiteboard. As the lesson started the researcher observed students joining the classroom as their names appeared in the 'attendees' section. The teacher was identified by name and using an icon on screen, rather than a photograph. Brief welcomes and introductions were carried out using the public chat, and then the lesson began. The teacher wrote and shared information relevant to the lesson using the interactive whiteboard alongside the public chat feature. Students were observed to comment and ask questions using the chat feature. The teacher appeared calm, approachable, and responsive in her online interactions. The speed and efficiency with which she shared information and resources on the whiteboard and responded to questions and comments in the chat feature suggested the lesson was well organised and that she was very competent using the VLP. The delivery of the lesson appeared to be fluid; the researcher was not aware of any technical disruptions relating

to the teacher's ICT or the VLP during the lesson. General activity within the public chat feature suggested that students were engaged in the lesson, although the researcher was not aware whether contributions were made by one or two students or by all students who had logged in. The observation was short, approximately 30 minutes, but provided useful insight into the VLP and what appeared to be an effective lesson.

3.5.1.4 The study's research questions

The systematic literature review revealed a limited evidence base for the use and effectiveness of online learning environments to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school. Considering the questions posed and conclusions drawn from the few previous studies exploring such provision, the researcher was able to generate the following research questions:

1. How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?
2. What are the perceived facilitators/barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate?

3.5.1.5 Propositions and rival explanations

A study's propositions guide the researcher to factors to be explored within the study and where to look for relevant evidence. They can be identified from the literature, personal/professional experience, theories and/or generalisations based on empirical data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Having specific questions and propositions can help the study to stay within feasible limits (Yin, 2014). The propositions in this study (shown in table 3.2) were identified from the literature and relate to perceptions of how virtual learning can support young people who are experiencing challenges to attending school, including perceived facilitators and barriers related to online learning.

3.5.1.6 Units of analysis

Units of analysis define the case and describe the methods used to study it. A case is defined as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 24). A case for example, can be an individual, group, setting, situation, or organisation (Robson, 2011). This study adopted a single case study design with embedded units of analysis (as illustrated in figure 1). The single case was Innovate; the virtual learning provision. The embedded units of analysis were:

- the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting young people experiencing challenges to attending school, with data collection methods consisting of; analysis of an archival

database provided by Innovate managers and semi-structured interviews with young people, parents, local authority representative and Innovate staff and,

- perceived facilitators and barriers to the effectiveness of the Innovate provision consisting of semi-structured interviews with young people, parents, Innovate staff and a local authority representative.

Table 3.2: Study propositions

Study propositions	Links to literature
1. Learning online provides a secure environment in which to learn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a secure environment in which to learn (Cook, 2005; Tyldesley, 2011).
2. Learning online enables a more personalised and flexible learning experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people can access a more individualised and differentiated learning experience (Thomson, 2010). • Curriculum tailored to the skills and interests of students (Cook, 2005). • Learning can be adapted to suit young person’s needs (Tyldesley, 2011). • Young people can work at a pace consistent with their rate of learning (Thomson, 2010). • Access to library of recorded lessons at any time (Tyldesley, 2011).
3. Learning online enables young people to have more control over their learning experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have more control over their learning experience (Thomson, 2010).
4. Learning online can help to develop personal learning skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have more time to reflect (Thomson, 2010). • Young people engage more in self-directed and independent learning (Thomson, 2010).
5. ICT and connectivity issues can inhibit the effectiveness of learning online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT /connectivity issues as barrier to learning online (St Leger & Campbell, 2008; Tyldesley, 2011).
6. Learning online can limit social opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited interaction with peers (Tyldesley, 2011).
7. Lack of training for staff can act as a barrier to learning online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student/teachers need to be competent with ICT (Duckworth, 2005). • More training needed for school staff (Tyldesley, 2011).

Yin (2014) suggests that embedded units of analysis can enable more extensive analysis, enhancing insights into the case. However, caution need to be taken to ensure that the case study does not only focus on the sub-units but returns to the larger unit of analysis (Yin, 2014). In establishing the case and units of analysis, the researcher was guided by the literature review, which Yin (2014) suggests can help to bind the case. Binding the case can help to determine what will and will not be studied and ensures data collection remains reasonable in

scope (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Suggestions regarding how to bind a case include; time and place (Cresswell, 1998), time and activity (Stake, 1995), by definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and the type of evidence to be collected (Yin, 2014). In this study, boundaries included: Innovate as the virtual learning provider; the time period covered by the case study, school year 2012-2013; and a sample of four young people participants using the Innovate provision within this time frame, from whom personal accounts were gathered regarding their use of the provision and its effectiveness in supporting them.

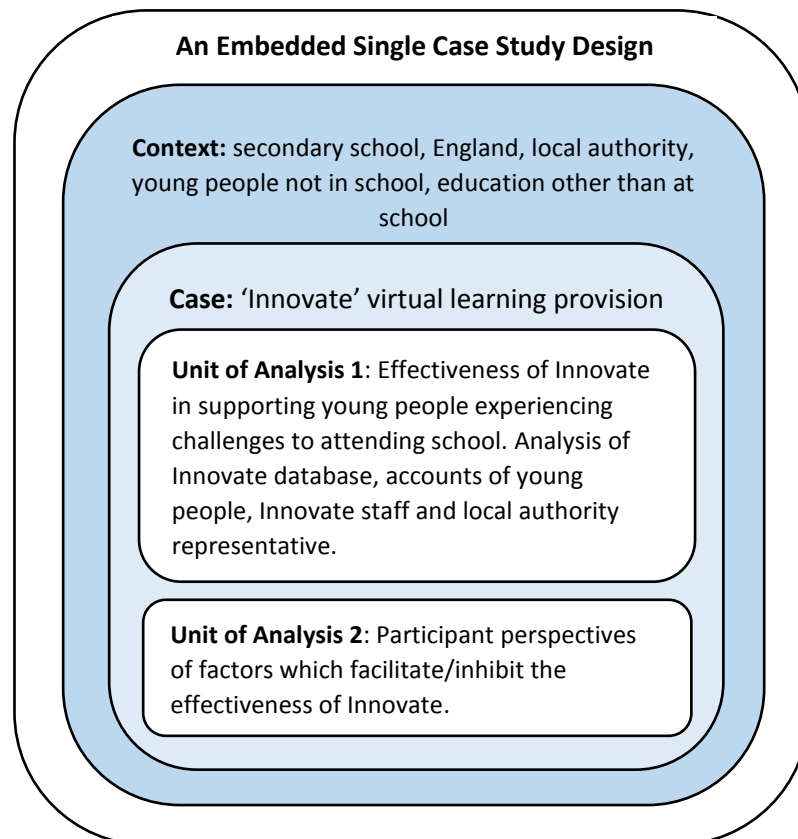


Figure 1: Embedded single case study design (Yin, 2009)

3.5.2 Critique of the design

Where case study research has been criticised for its inability to establish causal relationships, Yin (2009) argues that case studies can offer important evidence in exploring the processes (the “how” and “why”) things work (or do not work) which other methods seeking to establish causal relationships may be unable to address. As the research is concerned with how the provision works, for whom and why, the use of a case study appeared fitting to the aims of the study. Yin (2009) argues that one of the strengths of using a case study is its ability to deal with a variety of evidence such as documents, artefacts, interviews, and observations; a strategy which also enhances credibility (Patton, 1990).

Other issues relating to the use of case studies within research include a lack of rigour and ability to generalise (Yin, 2009) as well as problems relating to observer bias (Nisbett & Watt, 1984). However, it is argued that issues relating to the rigour of case study research can be addressed within the study design, data collection, analysis (Robson, 2011; Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005), interpretation and reporting (Robson, 2011). To reduce bias within the research, the research employed inter-rater measures, where a set of data were independently analysed by a colleague using thematic analysis, with reliability being measured by the percentage of identified themes agreed. The researcher also intended to employ member checking; where themes generated from the data are fed back to participants to ensure they were a true representation of their views. However due to circumstances outside the researcher's control, the analysis and completion of the findings extended beyond the initial time frame of the study and therefore member checking was not carried out.

3.5.3 Sampling and participant recruitment

Several virtual learning providers were contacted by the researcher to request their participation in the study. Innovate was selected by the researcher as they were the first of these provisions to offer their participation. Information regarding the study was shared with the Chief Operations Manager along with a consent form for Innovate's participation in the research (appendix A). Innovate is utilised within many local authorities within England and provides support for young people from KS3 to A level, who are experiencing barriers to their learning, including medical, emotional, behavioural, and learning needs. Data were collected from Innovate archival records (anonymised database) and from individual participants enrolled in Innovate, as well as their parent, and one of their teachers from Innovate. Innovate managers; the Chief Operations Manager and a Regional Manager, and a local authority representative; a customer of Innovate were also interviewed.

Cohen et al. (2007) suggests that four key factors are considered in relation to sampling and recruitment: sample size, representativeness of sample, sampling strategy and access to sample. The research population in this case was young people enrolled with Innovate. The Innovate dataset provided on 30.04.12 confirmed that there were 480 young people enrolled with the provision at that time, from 58 different local authorities across England. This sample size was deemed large enough to carry out quantitative analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics to gather information relating to the first research question.

In relation to qualitative research, sample size is dependent on the purpose, design and methods used as well as the resources available. To allow enough data to be gathered whilst ensuring that it remained manageable, it was decided that four young people would be

selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. In addition, for each young person participating, a parent/carer, member of Innovate teaching staff and LA representative would also be invited to participate.

A survey of the archival data was used to explore characteristics of 480 young people enrolled with Innovate at that time and to develop a sampling strategy for young person participants. Characteristics available in the archival data included; gender, date of birth, category of need, subjects, attendance (percentage), behaviour, and contribution (a scoring key was provided for behaviour and contribution from one to four; where one was excellent, two was good, three was satisfactory and four was unsatisfactory). Behaviour and contributions scores are subjective ratings made by Innovate teachers and are not criterion-referenced.

A stratified purposeful sampling strategy was used to select four young person participants; criterion for selection were identified from the survey of archival data. Criterion included:

- 3:1 or 2:2 ratio male:female.
- One case Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) /excluded, one case anxiety, one case, school refusal, one case chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)/myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME).
- 3:1 ratio KS3:KS4.
- Three young people whose expected attendance was over 112 sessions and one whose expected attendance was below 112 sessions, (112 sessions was the average attendance at live lessons).
- All young people to have a score of two or below for behaviour.
- All young people to have scored less than 82% unauthorised absence.

Further inclusion criteria included:

- Young people who were enrolled with Innovate or had been within the previous two months.

Selection criteria were provided to the Regional Manager who agreed to identify potential participants and to share introductory information (appendix B) with them and their parent(s)/carer(s) regarding the research. The researcher was mindful that some of the young people enrolled with Innovate might be considered vulnerable and hard to reach due to the nature of their difficulties and therefore access to a purposeful sample may be difficult.

It was possible to meet some of the selection criterion, for example a 3:1 male:female ratio, all four participants had a score of one for behaviour and had less than 82% unauthorised absence. However, access to participants was limited by access through the Innovate Regional

Manager. Of those participants who had initially been identified, it was perceived that participation in the research could potentially elevate anxiety or stress, due to the nature of the difficulties they experienced; a view the manager said was shared by some parents. Limited access to participants was suboptimal in terms of the planned sampling strategy, and convenience sampling had to be used to some extent to identify four young people willing to participate within the time frame of the study (school year 2012-2013). All four young people identified by the Regional Manager were medically ill, and each had an attendance of over 112 sessions. The ratio of participants KS3:KS4 was 1:3. In addition, two of the young people were siblings and therefore one parent was interviewed for both participants. A summary of young person participant details is provided in table 3.3 (over page).

For each young person participant, a parent/carer, Innovate teacher and local authority representative in relation to the young person was sought for participation in the study. This was to gain the perspectives of those closest to the young person and to compare and contrast multiple sources of data in order to obtain a richer picture relating to the perceived facilitators and barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting the young person's learning. The Regional Manager was asked to identify LA representatives; customers of Innovate. The four young people participants were asked to identify a teacher they were happy to be invited to take part and comment on their learning with Innovate. As such the sampling strategy for Innovate teaching staff was limited to those with whom the four young people were working.

The Innovate Regional Manager was unable to identify a local authority representative participant for any of the young people due to difficulties outside their control. However, they were able to identify one LA representative (a Depute Head Teacher) using Innovate to provide for several young people in their school who agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview.

3.5.3.1 Vignettes for participants

At the time of interview, Abigail was age 17 years and in Key Stage Four. She had been enrolled with Innovate for five months and studied with them from her home in the North of England. Her category of need as assigned by Innovate was 'medically ill: CFS/ME'. She was studying GCSE English Literature and GCSE English Language and had 90.42% attendance. Her average score for both behaviour and contribution in lessons was one, meaning excellent.

Brian was age 16 years and in Key Stage Four at the time of interview. He had also been enrolled with Innovate for five months and studied with them from his home in the South of England. His category of need as assigned by Innovate was 'medically ill'. He was studying GCSE Maths, GCSE English Literature, GCSE English Language, GCSE Science as well as ICT. He

Table 3.3: Summary of young person participant details

Young person number and pseudonym	Gender	Age (years) and school stage at interview	Length of time enrolled with Innovate at time of interview	Category of need	Subjects studying with Innovate	Percentage attendance	Behaviour (scoring key: 1 = excellent 2 = good 3 = satisfactory 4 = unsatisfactory)	Contribution (scoring key: 1 = excellent 2 = good 3 = satisfactory 4 = unsatisfactory)
Young Person 1: Abigail	Female	17 years KS4	5 months	Medically ill: CFS/ME	GCSE English Literature GCSE English Language	90.42%	1	1
Young Person 2: Brian	Male	16 years KS4	5 months	Medically ill	GCSE Maths GCSE English Literature GCSE English Language GCSE Science ICT	81.23%	1	1
Young Person 3: Cameron	Male	16 years KS4	3 years	Medically ill: CFS/ME	GCSE Maths Literacy	90.44%	1	1
Young Person 4: David	Male	13 years KS3	2 years	Medically ill: CFS/ME	NS2 English NS2 Maths	97.62%	1	1

had 81.23% attendance, and scores of one (meaning excellent) for both behaviour and contribution in lessons.

Cameron was age 16 years and in Key Stage Four at the time of interview. He had been enrolled with Innovate for three years and studied with them from his home in the South of England. His category of need as assigned by Innovate was 'medically ill: CFS/ME'. He was studying GCSE Maths and Literacy. He had 90.44% attendance and scores of one (meaning excellent) for both behaviour and contribution in lessons.

David was age 13 years and in Key Stage Three at the time of interview. He is the younger sibling of Cameron. He had been enrolled with Innovate for two years and studied with them from his home in the South of England. His category of need as assigned by Innovate was 'medically ill: CFS/ME'. He was studying NS2 English and NS2 Maths. He had 97.62% attendance and scores of one (meaning excellent) for both behaviour and contribution in lessons.

The two parents who were interviewed were Parent A; the parent of Abigail, and Parent B; the parent of both Cameron and David.

The four Innovate teachers interviewed were identified by each of the young people as people they were happy for the researcher to talk to about their learning with Innovate. Callum was an English teacher (identified by Abigail) who had been teaching with Innovate for six years at the time of interview. Arthur was a science teacher (identified by Brian) who had been teaching with Innovate for almost two years at the time of interview. Harry was a Maths teacher (identified by Cameron) who had been teaching with Innovate for almost three years at the time of interview. Finally, Helen was an English teacher (identified by David) who had been working with Innovate for 18 months at the time of interview.

The LA representative interviewed; Jane, was a Head of Upper School at a large high school in the North of England. She had no connection to the young people interviewed but her school had contracted Innovate to deliver learning to a small number of pupils for the previous two years. One pupil during the previous school year who was medically ill, and two pupils during the school year during which the interview took place, both of whom had a diagnosis of autism.

The Chief Operations Manager was based at Innovate's headquarters in the South of England and had been employed with Innovate for around a year at the time of interview. The Regional Manager was based in the Innovate office in the North of England.

3.5.3.2 Critique of the sample

Due to difficulties accessing participants, the stratified purposeful sampling strategy had to be modified and an element of convenience sampling was employed to identify four students who were willing to participate. It is acknowledged that representative sampling within real world research can prove very difficult (Robson, 2011). The four students had the same category of need, therefore the sample was not representative of the larger population of young people enrolled with the provision, as identified by the survey of archival data. It is possible that the four young people were approached by the Innovate Regional Manager because they were likely to be willing to participate or because they were identified as 'good' students and/or because the Innovate Manager believed they were likely to give positive feedback about their experience with the provision. The researcher acknowledges that these constitute likely sampling biases and therefore it would be difficult to generalise findings to the larger population. However, it can be argued that as all four young people shared the same category of need of medically ill, that findings may go some way to understanding how Innovate works for a similar group of students within the Innovate population, and to some extent within the wider population of VLP-educated students. It can also be argued that 'good' students will provide positive and useful information which can support analytic generalisation (as opposed to scientific generalisation), "in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of a study" (Yin, 2009, p. 38).

3.6 Data gathering and analysis methods

Evidence was gathered from multiple sources of data which Yin (2009) argues can help to corroborate information relating to the phenomena and support triangulation of data as well as increasing construct validity. Data sources and analysis included; survey and analysis of fully anonymised archival data provided by Innovate, analysis of data relating to each of the young people participating provided by Innovate, semi-structured interviews with the young people, parents, teachers and a customer of Innovate, which were fully transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), unstructured exploratory interviews with each of the Innovate managers which were fully transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, and the researchers research diary. The site visit and observation of an Innovate lesson along with analysis of documentation and the Innovate website, provided useful contextual information in describing the case (see section 3.5.2.1) and gaining further insight into the VLP. A summary of data collection methods relating to each research question is shown in table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Summary of data collection methods

Research Question	Data collection methods
<p>1. How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstructured exploratory interviews with Chief Operations Manager and Regional Manager (3.6.4). Analysis of archival data provided by Innovate (3.6.1). • Analysis of Innovate’s inspection document (3.6.2) • Semi-structured interviews with four young people, their parent/carer, one of their Innovate teachers as well as a LA customer of Innovate (3.6.3)
<p>2. What are the perceived facilitators/barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews with four young people, their parent/carer, one of their Innovate teachers as well as a LA customer of Innovate (3.6.3). • Unstructured exploratory interviews with the Chief Operations Manager and the Regional Manager (3.6.3). • Analysis of Innovate’s inspection document (3.6.2)

3.6.1 Archival data

A fully anonymised dataset was provided by the Innovate Manager during a site visit on 30.04.12. The dataset included information relating to 480 students on roll with Innovate. The raw data provided included:

- general data including; Innovate unique ID (anonymous), date of birth, gender, ethnicity, and Local Educational Authority.
- category of need; most students within the data set had at least one category of need identified. Some of those students also had a secondary and/or tertiary category of need identified. Categories included: ‘disaffected, EBD (Emotional Behavioural Difficulties), excluded, medically ill: CFS/ME, medically ill: anxiety (including school phobia), medically ill: social phobia, medically ill: agoraphobic, medically ill: other, school refuser, bullied, in care/looked after, pregnant/SAM, traveller, learning difficulties (including Autism), additional support (e.g. revision or booster sessions) and disabled’.
- subject and class name, and curriculum level.

- attendance data including total sessions present, total sessions absent, number of authorised absences, number of unauthorised absences and expected attendance. Attendance data is only gathered for 'real time' lessons; not recorded lessons which students are also able to access in their own time.
- average behaviour and average contribution, which were given a score from one to four, where 1 = excellent, 2 = good, 3 = satisfactory and 4 = unsatisfactory. The researcher recognises that the scores for behaviour and contribution may be seen as subjective because they are given to students by individual subject teachers within the context of the lesson being taught and the group of students within that lesson.

Full data for date of birth, gender and ethnicity was available for every student. There was some missing data for category of need, subject and class name and level, and across the attendance, behaviour, and contribution data. Missing data levels are identified in the presentation of results (see table 4.1). Raw attainment data relating to baseline and summative assessment and coursework progress was considered to be useful but could not feasibly be provided. One of the Innovate managers provided their own analysis of their attainment data from the school year 2011-12 which is discussed in section 3.6.2 below.

The raw data provided by Innovate was uploaded to SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences). Sixteen variables were created; participant number, date of birth, gender, ethnicity, LA, category of need (primary), category of need (secondary), category of need (tertiary), attendance; total present, attendance; total absent, authorised absence, unauthorised absence, expected attendance and average behaviour and average contribution. Transformed data included percentage attendance as well as key stage and age in months on 30.04.12 (the date the data set was received). Missing values were excluded from analysis pairwise.

Following data screening to check parametric assumptions, appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were undertaken to explore any patterns emerging. Key variables of average behaviour, average contribution and percentage attendance did not meet parametric assumptions, therefore non-parametric analyses were used with missing data points excluded pairwise.

3.6.2 National inspection process report

Yin (2009) suggests that documentary information relating to the topic of the case study is likely to be relevant and can provide 'specific details to corroborate information from other sources' (Yin, 2009, p. 103). As a source of evidence, Yin (2009) argues that documents have strengths in; their stability and ability to be reviewed repeatedly, their unobtrusiveness (they have not been created as part of the case study), and their exactness; they contain exact

names, references, and details of an event. However, documentary information may also be subject to biased selectivity (incomplete information) as well as reporting bias of the author (Yin, 2009).

Innovate were inspected through a national inspection process in November 2017 and a report was produced. The organisation who carried out the inspection is independent, and their role is to ensure that educational provisions in England are of a high standard for CYP. Information gathered to inform the report included; Innovate's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, observations of learning sessions, assessment and progress reviews, and group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of staff and students. Whilst the inspection report was produced out with the initial data collection period of the current study and therefore extends it, the contents of the report are considered relevant to the research questions posed and therefore a content analysis of the report was carried out.

3.6.3 Content analysis

Content analysis is defined as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use' (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). Advantages of using content analysis include that it is an unobtrusive technique, and that the data are in permanent form, meaning they can be reanalysed and checked for reliability (Robson, 2011). Disadvantages include that the documents may be limited and have been written for a purpose other than the research, therefore they may be subject to biases (Robson, 2011).

3.6.3.1 Process of carrying out content analysis

Content analysis begins with selecting the unit of analysis, which in this case was a nine-page inspection report as described above. Ezzy (2002) suggests that the basic process of analysis involves reviewing, coding, and categorising the data, after which occurrences of words, codes and categories are counted and logged. The researcher followed the process outlined in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) and took a largely deductive approach; taking into consideration the research questions and the study propositions resulting from the literature review to inform coding of the text. An element of inductive analysis was also used so as not to miss any new or unexpected categories emerging from the data. The researcher began by reading and rereading the data to become familiarise themselves with it and to note any patterns or features of interest. Initial codes were ascribed to the data (staying close to the data), line by line, and reviewed and modified where necessary to ensure consistency. Patterns and frequencies of codes were considered, and codes were grouped together where

appropriate to create categories. The frequency of codes was counted and recorded; with the categories and most frequently recorded codes being reported in the findings (see section 4.3). These were considered to be reflective of the main themes and sub-themes identified through thematic analysis of the qualitative data in the current study. An example of the content analysis can be found appendix C.

3.6.4 Interviews with participants

Yin (2009) suggests that interviews are one of the most important sources of data collection for case study research. They enable exploration of the perceptions and views of the participants (Barriball & White, 1994) in relation to the meaning of particular phenomena (King 1994). Interviews within the current study were used to explore the context of Innovate and to answer both research questions. They were carried out with four young people, two parents, four Innovate teachers, a LA representative as well as two members of the Innovate management team. Seeking the viewpoints and differing perspectives of students, parents and education staff is essential for understanding learning within the particular context surrounding the young person (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007; Cresswell, 2007).

Preliminary unstructured exploratory interviews were carried out separately; first with the Chief Operations Manager and then with the Regional Manager, to gather information to inform the research process, specifically participant recruitment, and to explore the context of the provision. The topics covered within these interviews included; the history and development of Innovate, its current core business in delivering personalised learning online, an overview of staff, students enrolled and courses available, data collected by the provision, how the provision works and in the view of the managers, why it works for different students. Unstructured exploratory interviews enable greater flexibility than structured interviews (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) and allow questions and points of interest to emerge from the immediate context (Patton, 1980). They can help to inform more structured data gathering at a later stage of the research (Gillham, 2005). However, they can also be less systematic as information is collected using different questions with different participants (Patton, 1980) as well as more time-consuming and difficult to manage (Gillham, 2005). It was the researcher's intention to carry out a second semi-structured interview with each of the managers, however, unforeseen delays in the research timeline did not allow for this.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to interview participants, which enabled the researcher to determine a set of questions but maintain flexibility in relation to the sequencing of questions, their exact wording, as well as time and attention to different areas of interest (Robson, 2011). Questions were 'open', rather than 'closed' which it is argued can allow

greater flexibility, encourage cooperation and rapport as well as depth of response, and enable the researcher to make “a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes” (Robson, 2002, p. 276). Interview questions included probes to further explore any areas of interest or importance which arise during the interview (Smith, 2008). It is argued that the use of probes can be invaluable in ensuring reliability of the data as they:

- allow for clarification of the interesting and relevant issues raised by participants (Hutchinson & Skodol-Wilson, 1992);
- can elicit valuable and complete information (Bailey, 1987; Gordon, 1975);
- enable the researcher to explore and clarify any inconsistencies within participant responses (Barriball & White, 1994);
- maximize the potential for interactive opportunities between the researcher and participant, which helps to establish a sense of rapport and reduce the risk of socially desirable behaviours (Patton, 1990).

Semi structured interviews can support conversation to flow more naturally, allow the participant freedom to further explore their thoughts and enable the researcher flexibility to follow up aspects of the participant’s responses (Coolican, 2009). However, because they are less structured, the researcher may be viewed to have less control over the interview (Smith, 2008), they may take longer to carry out (Smith, 2008) and they may be viewed as less reliable (Coolican, 2009). However, where a structured, standardised interview may go some way to resolving these issues, they are unable to offer the same degree of flexibility that semi-structured interviews can, in relating the interview to individuals and circumstances. As such, semi-structured interviews appeared to offer the best fit of data gathering to elicit the views of young people within the context of their individual circumstances.

Interviews were carried out using different media. Innovate managers and three of the teachers were interviewed face-to-face at the Innovate office in the North of England during site visits. The interview with the LA representative was carried out face-to-face in a private room at their school in the North of England. Interviews with two of the young people, both parents, and one of the Innovate teachers was carried out by telephone. Two of the young people were interviewed online through Innovate’s VLP, using a private classroom. This was to enable the researcher to interview participants at a distance across a wide geographical area, but also to enable the young person participants a degree of privacy and anonymity. All four young people accessed Innovate from their home. The researcher and Regional Manager considered that face-to-face interviews in the young person’s home may be considered intrusive and stressful for the young person, particularly as they were medically unwell. It is

suggested that interviewing participants by telephone and online can affect the ability to build rapport, however they may enable them to feel more willing to talk honestly (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora & Mattis, 2007). It is further suggested they can reduce interviewer effects (Cohen et al. 2007) and power imbalances between the participant and researcher (Robinson, 2001). The researcher was mindful that using the Innovate VLP to interview one of the young people (which was at the young person's request) meant that the setting was less neutral than it might have been by telephone. The researcher was assured that the online 'chat' within the private classroom would not be able to be viewed or recorded by anyone else and this was also discussed with the young person prior to interview. However, the researcher acknowledges that the interview may have been susceptible to bias in that the young person may have been more cautious in their answers.

3.6.4.1 Interview schedule and questions

The research propositions (table 3.1) were used to develop the questions for the semi-structured interviews, ensuring that they were relevant to the research questions and enabled a comprehensive and holistic picture of the case study. Semi-structured interview schedules typically include an introduction, a brief and structured sequence of questions to establish key biographical information, key interview questions and set of associated prompts which the researcher uses as a guide to the interview, and closing comments (Robson, 2011). Consideration was given to the language and framing of questions which were tailored specifically to the participant group. The interview schedules used in the current study can be found in the following appendices: young people; appendix D, parents; appendix E, Innovate teachers; appendix F, LA representative; appendix G. An interview schedule was devised for Innovate Managers (appendix H); however, the researcher was unable to carry out a second round of interviews with the managers due to unforeseen delays in the research timeline.

3.6.4.2 Interview process and details

Prior to interview, contact information for all participants was provided by Innovate. The researcher then sent each participant an information sheet and consent form (appendices I through L; young people, parents, Innovate staff, and customer respectively) which was returned to the researcher. Following receipt of the consent form, the researcher contacted each young person and parent participant by phone to arrange a mutually convenient time for interview. The LA representative was contacted by email to confirm interview arrangements and the Innovate teacher interviews were arranged in conjunction with the Innovate Regional Manager.

Young person participants were interviewed for up to 30 minutes. Two young people were interviewed by phone and two young people (siblings) were interviewed using the Innovate VLP. The researcher was very mindful that the young people had needs relating to being medically unwell and they were advised during the introduction of the interview that they could take a break or terminate the interview at any time should they need to. They were also reminded that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, which they had given written consent for prior to being contacted to arrange interview.

Other participants were interviewed for up to an hour. The LA representative was interviewed in a private room at the school where they worked in the North of England. Three of the teachers and the Regional Managers were interviewed in a private room at their offices in the North of England. The Chief Operations Manager was interviewed in a private room at the University of Manchester. One teacher was interviewed by telephone as they were employed some distance away at Innovate's headquarters in the South of England.

To ensure that the participants felt comfortable, at ease and able to talk as freely and openly as possible, the researcher employed active listening skills, being mindful of listening more than speaking (Robson, 2011) and showing interest and attention to what the participant was saying and communicating (Coolican, 2009). There were some limitations to this within the phone and online interviews due to the absence of non-verbal cues. During these interviews the researcher was mindful to create sufficient space for the participant to respond and to use opportunities to clarify their understanding of what the participant had said. The researcher was also mindful of further advice given by Robson (2011, p. 282) to "put questions in a straightforward, clear and non-threatening way" and to "eliminate cues which lead interviewees to respond in a particular way."

Each of the interviews were audio recorded with the exception of the interview with the young person using the VLP, where the text chat facility enabled a full written transcription to be documented. An audio-recording provides the researcher with a record of the interview and enables them to concentrate on the interview itself (Robson, 2011). Participants were made aware of the audio-recorder within the information sheet and had consented to the use of it prior to interview. Each of the audio recorded interviews were then fully transcribed by the researcher and analysed using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.6.4.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely used and flexible research tool used to identify, analyse, and report themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It has received some criticism for being a method independent of theory or philosophical position (Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2015),

however it is argued that because it is theoretically flexible, it can be applied across a range of philosophical approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, TA lends itself well to a critical realist position as adopted within the current study, where knowledge is socially construed, and participants create meaning of their experiences (constituting a layer of reality) within their social contexts. TA can both reflect 'reality' and unpick participant perceptions of it by exploring their experiences and the meanings they create (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within critical realism, experiences and meanings can be theorized in a straightforward way because "a simple, largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning, and experience and language" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85).

One of the advantages of TA is its usefulness for summarizing key features of large amounts of qualitative data using a principled approach (Robson, 2011), which can provide "a rich and detailed, yet complex account" of the data gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Its flexibility enables a wide range of analytic options; however, this may also be considered a disadvantage because it means the potential range of things that can be said about the data is broad and this can inhibit the researcher when trying to decide which aspects of the data to focus on (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It has also received some criticism for being limited to description of the data rather than interpretation and therefore does not necessarily result in the production of theory (Coolican, 2009). In order to address these criticisms to some extent, it is argued that TA should be informed by, and grounded in, the researcher's theoretical and methodological assumptions (Braun et al., 2015), that analysis should go beyond mere description and include "analytical, interpretative insight on the part of the researcher" (Braun et al., 2015, p. 101), and that findings should be related back to previous theory and research (the study propositions) to build on these in light of the themes identified (Coolican, 2009).

A distinction is made between inductive TA which is data driven; that is coding and analysis start 'bottom up' from the data, and deductive TA which is 'top down' where previous theory is used to inform the search for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive TA means that the themes are strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) however, Braun et al. (2015) suggest that TA can never be purely inductive because the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions as well as their values, always shape how data is read and interpreted. Boyatzis (1998) describes the two approaches as forming a continuum.

A distinction is also made between semantic and latent themes within data analysis, where the former relates to themes explicit in the text and represented directly by quotations (Coolican, 2009) and the latter relates to the underlying ideas and constructs that are seen to shape the semantic content of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is suggested that the aim of analysis with regard to semantic themes is to demonstrate patterns in the data which can be related back to

existing theory or support development of new concepts (Coolican, 2009), whereas analysis of latent themes involves interpretation and thus moves beyond description to theorising (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun et al. (2015) suggest that analysis often combines elements of inductive/deductive and semantic/latent coding.

3.6.4.3.1 Process of carrying out thematic analysis

Thematic analysis employed within the current study followed the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012, 2013, 2015):

1. Familiarisation with the data.
2. Coding the data.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Producing the report.

Further detail of the researcher's process in relation to each of the phases can be found in table 3.5. Although the phases appear linear, the process is "fluid and recursive" (Braun et al. 2015, p. 99) and the researcher moved back and forward through the latter phases to refine the analysis.

The researcher adopted a largely deductive approach to analysis in that codes and themes were considered in light of the research questions and the study propositions which resulted from review of the literature. As pointed out by Braun et al. (2015), the researcher also acknowledges that their philosophical assumptions and values inevitably shaped the way they read and interpreted the data.

However, the researcher was also mindful that any new or unexpected themes emerging were not missed and were strongly linked to the data. Therefore, an element of inductive analysis was also employed.

The nature of the research was exploratory and aimed to identify themes and patterns within the data which might support a more interpretative analysis in relation to previous literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such themes were largely derived directly from the data and at the semantic level, where coding mirrors participants' language and concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, moving from descriptive to interpretative analysis can mean that a latent approach to analysis is also employed and data can be coded at both the semantic and the latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This appears to fit well with a critical realist position which aims to understand how things work beyond what is observed and where meaning needs to be

Table 3.5: The phases and process of thematic analysis carried out by the researcher

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarisation with the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from the semi structured and exploratory interviews were fully transcribed by the researcher. • Data were read and re-read. • Initial notes were made regarding items of interest/ observations as well as potential codes relating to the study propositions.
2. Coding the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual transcriptions were analysed, and initial codes were created relating to the study propositions (including those refuting them) as well as other possible themes/patterns of interest. • NVivo 10 software was used to create codes by tagging and naming the relevant section of text. • Once the entire data set had been analysed and coded, earlier items were reviewed and re-coded, if necessary, to ensure thoroughness and consistency (Braun et al., 2015).
3. Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codes along with relevant data extracts from the transcriptions were copied from NVivo and collated into tables in five Word documents (one document for each participant group) using the 'copy' and 'paste' functions. • The tables for each group were then cut into sections containing individual codes with their relevant data extracts. • In relation to each participant group, codes with similar meaning were clustered together on large pieces of flip chart paper, fixed with blu-tack, to create potential themes relating to the research questions. Color coded post-it notes were used to identify potential main themes and sub-themes. • A central organizing concept for each theme was identified to ensure that themes were internally coherent and distinct from one another (Braun et al. 2015). • Initial thematic maps were created for each participant group, illustrating main themes and sub-themes.
4. Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential themes were reviewed by re-reading all the coded extracts for each theme and checking for consistency and coherence and revisions were made accordingly. • A draft narrative of the findings by participant group was started. Themes from each group were considered across the whole dataset in light of the research questions. This revealed repetition within themes and so the boundaries of themes were adjusted to across the groups rather than by group. Main themes and sub-themes were reviewed again by re-reading the coded extracts from across the groups. Thematic maps were revised and restructured to improve organization of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main themes and sub-themes were refined and defined. Final theme names were identified. • Data extracts from across the data set were finalised.
6. Producing the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final thematic maps were created. • Final themes and sub-themes relating to each research question were written into the findings section of the thesis, illustrated by the thematic maps, and accompanied by illustrative data extracts.

interpreted and understood (Sayer, 2000). Transcriptions of young person participant interviews were analysed and coded first in the order that they were carried out, followed by the parent interview transcriptions, then the teachers, then the LA representative and finally the Innovate Managers. Each transcription was colour coded to enable the researcher to distinguish between participants at a glance and to aid identification during coding and theming. It also enabled the researcher to view the spread of data more easily across codes and themes.

The researcher used a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) programme; QSR NVivo 10, to assist with the organisation and initial analysis of data gathered.

CAQDAS programmes can support the organisation and storage of large amounts of qualitative data as well as “the development of consistent coding schemes” (Robson, 2011, p. 472).

Numerous programmes are available which typically share a common set of core functions, including: “coding tools to organise and interpret concepts, processes, interactions, etc...to interrogate and identify meaningful patterns and relationships” (Silver & Lewins, 2010, p. 326).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) highlight that the researcher remains the main tool for analysis; CAQDAS programmes cannot carry out the analysis, rather, they facilitate it. Issues relating to the use of such programmes have included that they may distance the researcher from their data (Gilbert, Jackson & di Gregorio, 2014) so the data become decontextualized or fragmented, or indeed that they result in researchers being too close to the data and therefore unable to see the bigger picture (Gilbert, 2002). However, a further argument is that CAQDAS tools can enable both a closeness to the data in terms of more efficient management of it, access to multiple sources and being able to retrieve and view coded text with ease, as well as creating distance when needed, for example, “modelling ideas...or summarising results” (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 8).

In the current study, the researcher chose to use QSR NVivo 10 to assist with the management of the data, to code the data and to manage and retrieve the codes (or “nodes” as identified in NVivo 10) alongside coded data extracts. This programme was chosen for several reasons including; its ability to carry out the functions the researcher required, the researcher’s level of competence and confidence using the software, and the availability of the software and support to use it offered through the university. Gibbs (2013) also suggests that analytic approaches such as thematic analysis, can be “well supported” (p. 289) by CAQDAS programmes.

Whilst NVivo 10 has additional tools to support analysis beyond coding, the researcher chose not to use these; with a preference to return to a paper exercise following the completion of coding the dataset. This was in part due to the researcher's level of competence and confidence in using the more complex tools available in Nvivo, but also their preference in working with the data in a manual way using a large visual representation of the all the codes and developing themes. It is suggested that moving away from the software and returning to a manual exercise can help to overcome the potential issues relating to being 'too close' or 'too distant' from the data (Gibbs, 2013).

3.7 Reliability and validity

Assessing and evaluating research, including the appropriateness of methods used, the accuracy of its findings and "the integrity of conclusions reached" (Long & Johnson, 2000, p. 30) is key to its effectiveness (Cohen et al. 2007). The terms reliability and validity are typically associated with a positivist position and as such their relevance to qualitative research has been debated (Noble & Smith, 2015). In applying the terms to qualitative research, Noble and Smith (2015, p. 34) offer the following definitions: validity refers to "the integrity and application of the methods undertaken and the precision in which findings accurately reflect the data" and reliability to "the consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings". Validity in qualitative research is concerned with 'truth value' and reliability with 'consistency' and 'neutrality' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Willig (2013) states that the researcher's philosophical position and the assumptions they make about the world, will have implications regarding how the research can be evaluated. It is suggested that realist research should be evaluated in terms of objectivity; referring to the absence of researcher bias, and reliability; using methods of triangulation to show how different perspectives converge and thus are seen to represent 'reality' (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000). Healy and Perry (2000) put forward six criteria for assessing the validity and reliability of realist research, which include; its "ontological appropriateness" (p. 121), contingent validity (the validity of generative mechanisms and the contexts they are dependent on), multiple perceptions of participants and researcher, methodological trustworthiness, analytic generalisation (Yin, 2009) and construct validity. Table 3.6 provides an overview of Healy and Perry's quality criteria next to that of Yin's (1994) case study criteria as well as Lincoln and Guba's (1985) qualitative research criteria. It also provides a final column relating to strategies which were used to enhance the credibility of the current study.

Table 3.6: Terminology used to describe the credibility of qualitative research and strategies used to enhance the credibility of the current study

Healy and Perry's (2000) quality criteria for case study research within the realism paradigm	Criteria for case study research (Yin, 1994)	Criteria for qualitative research from Lincoln & Guba (1985), cited in Noble & Smith (2015)	Strategies used to enhance the credibility of the current study (Adapted from: Healy & Perry 2000, Thompson & Perry, 2004, Noble & Smith, 2015)
1. Ontological appropriateness (research deals with complex phenomena involving reflective people)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of appropriate research question; e.g. how and why question • Use of prior theory • Triangulation of data • Audit trail
2. Contingent validity (open systems involving generative mechanisms, rather than direct cause and effect)	Internal validity	'Truth value' or credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of context of case • Audit trail, research diary • Peer debriefing and support • Semi-structured audio recorded interviews • Use of rich and thick verbatim extracts
3. Multiple perceptions of participants (value aware, as opposed to value-free or value-laden)		Neutrality or confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple data sources • Broad questioning in interview before probes • Triangulation • Awareness of own values and impact of these • Peer review • Transparent and clear description of research process • Emerging themes discussed with research peers so that assumptions could be challenged
4. Methodological trustworthiness (trustworthy, the research can be audited)	Reliability	Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of frequent and relevant quotations that summarise data and support theory building • Transparent and clear description of research process and procedures • Research diary • Emerging themes discussed with research peers so that assumptions could be challenged
5. Analytic generalisation (theory building rather than statistical generalisation)	Analytic generalisation	Applicability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of theory through triangulation of data • Rich detail of context facilitates the evaluation of study conclusions and transferability of results
6. Construct validity	Construct validity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review, use of prior theory • Development and use of protocols for interviews • Triangulation

Consistent with a critical realist ontology and epistemology, the current study deals with a complex social phenomenon; Innovate, involving reflective people (Healy & Perry, 2000) and aimed to understand how Innovate works best, for whom and under what circumstances. It considered prior theory included in the literature review and triangulation of data gathered which included converging perspectives; young people, parents, teachers, a LA customer and Innovate managers, to gain further insights into Innovate and its effectiveness. The researcher recognised that multiple perspectives of Innovate existed, including those of the researcher.

Being thorough and honest throughout the research process and demonstrating this to others (Robson, 2011) can enhance the quality of the research. The researcher aimed to make their philosophical position, values, and methodological decisions as clear and transparent as possible, including attempting to acknowledge any personal or methodological sources of bias, and the steps taken to reduce these where possible. For example, an element of convenience sampling needed to be employed in order to recruit participants which meant that the sample used was not representative of the larger population of young people enrolled with Innovate. The researcher acknowledged potential sampling and respondent biases in that the young people who took part may have been approached by the Innovate Regional Manager because they were 'good' students or were likely to give positive feedback regarding the provision. It is also acknowledged that the young people may have wanted to 'please' the Innovate manager by giving positive feedback.

A brief description of strategies which the researcher employed to minimise threats to the reliability and validity of the current study is now provided.

3.7.1 Audit trail

The researcher maintained an audit trail as described by Robson (2011) which can minimise threats to validity. This included; raw data (archival database, interview transcripts, field notes etc.), details of the researcher's sampling and participant recruitment process, data gathering and analysis techniques, details of findings, and a research diary.

3.7.2 Research diary

Research diaries can take a variety of formats and can include communication such as emails, memos, and narratives (Treharn & Riggs, 2015). In this research the diary consisted of an A4 folder which was used to collate information and enable the researcher to record a full and detailed history of the research process. The research diary included; email correspondence with the and research supervisor, written notes of supervision sessions, written notes of phone correspondence with the research site, minutes of meetings with Innovate managers,

record of observation, scheduling information for interviews, interview notes, researcher's notes and references as well as personal reflections, and plans for next steps.

3.7.3 Researcher reflexivity

As well as keeping a detailed history of the research process, the researcher also used the research diary to maintain a reflexive stance throughout the research process to gain further insight into their role and the impact they may have on the research (Cassell, 2005). The researcher was mindful of the potential impact of their personal values, beliefs and experiences on the research process, the interpretation of data gathered, and the conclusions. It is suggested that these be clearly located within the research and presented clearly, honestly, and informatively (Willig, 2013). In relation to their axiological position as described above, the researcher believed the young people's views were central to understanding the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting their learning. However, they also acknowledge that in striving to understand the effectiveness of Innovate as a whole, it was important to explore the perspectives of additional key stakeholders who could provide insight into broader factors which may be of less concern to the young people, or which they may not be fully aware of, for example, the provision's organisational ethos, or funding issues.

In relation to interviews with young people, the researcher had initially proposed to carry these out face-to-face to help gather contextual data including observation of the young person using the VLP. An initial exploratory interview revealed that Innovate employed learning mentors in some geographical regions who provided face-to-face support to young people and the researcher and her supervisor had considered that the researcher could arrange to meet the young person jointly with their learning mentor. However, a further exploratory interview with the Regional Manager revealed that learning mentors were a recent initiative and only available to a small number of young people. In addition, many young people accessed the provision from home rather than a learning centre and due to their needs, the Regional Manager felt a home visit may be perceived as stressful. Taking this into account in addition to potential difficulties visiting participant homes as a lone researcher, the initial proposal was amended, including information and consent forms, and interviews with young people and parents were carried out by telephone.

3.7.4 Peer debriefing

The researcher had regular meetings with their supervisor throughout the research process, either face-to-face or by phone, which can help to minimise researcher bias. As described by Guba (1981), peer debriefing can provide researchers "with the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions" (Guba, 1981, p. 85). The

supervisor accompanied the researcher on two initial site visits and was present for the two exploratory interviews with Innovate Managers as well as the lesson observation. This provided a second viewpoint, sounding board and check relating to the methodology as well as the researcher's initial insights and potential assumptions relating to interpretations of early data collection. During data analysis, emerging themes were regularly discussed with the supervisor to clarify and modify codes and themes where necessary, and to identify potential themes which the researcher may not have captured which Yardley (2008) suggests can increase the consistency and coherence of the analysis.

3.7.4 Triangulation

Employing multiple interviews to triangulate the data was another strategy used by the researcher to enhance the validity of the research. Triangulation of the data can help to establish any convergence or divergence between data sources regarding the phenomena (Erzberger & Prein, 1997). Five groups of participants were interviewed and the findings from these were completed by comparing data across the five groups. In addition, methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1988) was used in combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the case; Innovate. Quantitative findings were explored in relation to themes which emerged from the qualitative interviews. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest that triangulation techniques can be helpful in case study research; "where a complex phenomenon requires elucidation" (p. 143).

3.7.5 Inter-coder reliability and agreement

The researcher also asked an EP colleague with experience of doctoral research using thematic analysis to code sections of each of the interview transcripts to ascertain the extent to which the researcher and colleague agreed in their coding of the data. General information about the study was provided to the researcher's colleague as well as a coding structure related to the study propositions. Campbell et al. (2013) highlight an important difference between inter-coder reliability and inter-coder agreement, where the former relates to "two or more equally capable coders operating in isolation from each other select the same code for the same unit of text" (p. 297) and the latter where "two or more coders are able to reconcile through discussion whatever coding discrepancies they may have for the same unit of text" (p. 297). Inter-coder reliability was carried out on the sections of transcripts by participant group, first young people, then parents, teachers, LA customer and finally managers. On the initial coding of all documents, 115 out of 193 codes showed agreement, with an inter-coder reliability of 60%. Whilst there doesn't appear to be an agreed threshold for a satisfactory percentage of agreement (Campbell et al., 2013), Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest between 80% and

90%. Most discrepancies were related to inductive rather than deductive coding, where data had been coded in relation to the research questions, but not necessarily linked to the study propositions provided in the coding structure. It is suggested that potential discrepancies in coding agreement can arise if one coder is more knowledgeable than the other regarding the interview subject matter (Garrison et al., 2006). The EP colleague had received general information about the study as well the coding structure, but it may have been helpful for the researcher to provide more detailed contextual information to their colleague to assist with the coding process. Nevertheless, through discussion regarding discrepancies in the coding, the researcher and EP colleague were able to reconcile a number of these; following discussion 175 out of 193 codes were agreed, with an inter-coder agreement of 91%.

Inter-coder reliability and agreement were not carried out for the content analysis of the Innovate inspection report due to time constraints, which the research acknowledges as a potential weakness relating to the validity of the associated findings. However, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the data, and strived to code close to the data (representative quotations from the text are illustrated in the analysis in appendix C).

3.7.6 Member checking and validity of findings

The researcher intended to carry out member checking with participants to ensure that their views had been accurately represented and to demonstrate their contributions were valued by the researcher, as well as to guard against researcher bias. However, delays in the timeline meant that this was not carried out and the researcher acknowledges this as a weakness relating to the validity of the findings. Audio-recordings of the interviews and full transcripts enabled the researcher to repeatedly revisit the raw data to check emerging themes to enhance the 'truth value' of the research (Noble & Smith, 2015). In addition, the researcher strived to use 'rich and thick' verbatim quotes (Noble & Smith, 2015) to ensure that final themes were as true to participant accounts as possible.

3.7.7 Generalisability

Generalisability is concerned with the extent to which findings from a study can be applied beyond the specific setting studied (Robson, 2011). Within quantitative research, statistical generalisation, which enables inferences to be drawn from data and applied to a wider population or different context, is viewed as a quality standard. However, Smith (2018) argues that this may be an unfair standard for qualitative research because it is 'informed by different epistemological and ontological assumptions, logics and goals' (p. 146). Typically, within qualitative research, the goal is 'to provide a rich, contextualised understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases' (Polit & Tatano

Beck, 2010, p. 1451), which Robson (2011, p. 160) argues “does not preclude some kind of generalisability beyond the specific setting studied. This may be thought of as the development of a theory which helps in understanding other cases or situations, sometimes referred to as analytic or theoretical generalisation”.

In pursuit of analytic generalisability, research findings are generalisable to theoretical propositions, rather than populations (Yin, 2009). As highlighted, the current research adopted a critical realist position and employed a single case study design with the aim of understanding underlying mechanisms regarding how Innovate works best, for whom and under what circumstances. It aims to provide detailed contextual information about Innovate as the case, as well as clear and robustly derived findings to answer the research questions within the context of Innovate. It is hoped that these findings may enable comparisons to other similar cases and findings.

3.8 Timeline and time budget

The research started in October 2011. An overview of the research process is shown in table 3.7. The initial timeline was delayed several times over the course of the research process due to a number of factors including; difficulties communicating with the research site, difficulties identifying participants, the researcher’s work place and home commitments, and researcher illness.

Table 3.7: Overview of research process

Activity:
Meet with Chief Operations Manager of ‘Innovate’ to discuss research
Submission of research for ethical approval
Ethical approval granted
Carry out site visit, access to archival data
Literature review (A2)
Identify participants, arrange interviews with key stakeholders
Carry out interviews with key stakeholders (phase 2)
Complete transcription
Write methodology
Thematic analysis of data, findings
Write up discussion and format
Submission of thesis

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethics are central to the research process and consideration should be given to ethical principles and practices throughout (Cohen, et al., 2007). The researcher was guided by the ethical principles and standards within The British Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics and

Conduct (2018) and their Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014), the Health and Care Professions Council's Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (2016) and the School of Education's Ethical Practice Policy and Guidance (The University of Manchester, 2011). Ethical approval was received from the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee (UREC) on 20th March 2012 (appendix M).

The research directly involved young people who may be considered 'vulnerable'. The researcher consulted closely with the Innovate Manager regarding potential young person participants and the type of needs they may have, and as such changes to aspects of data gathering were made. The researcher had initially planned to visit the young person at the location where they carried out their learning (for example, learning centre, or home) to carry out the interview. However, the Innovate Regional Manager expressed some concern that depending on their individual needs, visiting a young person's home may be perceived as stressful. The manager suggested that carrying out interviews from a distance might be considered less stressful and therefore may aid participant recruitment. As such the researcher amended the medium of interview to telephone or online using an Innovate private classroom (as suggested by the Innovate Regional Manager) and the information sheets and consent forms for young people and their parents were amended to reflect this. The researcher continued to liaise closely with the Innovate Regional Manager once young person participants had been identified to ascertain the young person's individual needs and circumstances which may be pertinent to the research. This was to ensure that the method for informing the young person about the research was appropriate and that their needs were taken into account throughout. For example, all four young people interviewed had needs relating to being medically ill and accessed Innovate from home which was also their place of rest. The researcher ensured that prior to interview, all young person participants were reminded that they could terminate the interview at any time, and they remained mindful of the young person's wellbeing throughout the interview. One of the young people requested to finish the interview early and this was acknowledged and actioned promptly, thanking the young person for their participation.

Informed consent was initially sought from Innovate's Chief Operations Manager's for Innovate to participate. This included consent to access participants as well as appropriate information regarding the provision to enable the researcher to carry out the research. Prior to and during initial data gathering, detailed discussions and negotiations were carried out between the researcher, their supervisor and the Innovate managers regarding the research, and changes to the research process were made where necessary. This included changes to data gathering methods (telephone or online interview rather than face-to-face) and data

analysis, where access to raw attainment was agreed but not granted and therefore could not be explored through analysis. Cohen et al. (2007) notes that ethical considerations relating to the research process can permeate the stage of access and should be negotiated with “relative openness, sensitivity, honesty, accuracy and scientific impartiality” (p. 57). The researcher was mindful of communication skills during discussions and negotiations with Innovate managers and aimed to demonstrate their competence and trustworthiness as a researcher in order that the managers felt fully informed and confident regarding the research process.

Informed consent was also sought from individual participants prior to any data collection. Parent’s consent was also sought for their child to participate. The researcher ensured that written information for young people was age appropriate, understandable, and accessible to them. Participants were made aware of the researcher’s background, the aim and purpose of the research, what they could expect, how information would be treated and how results would be reported. They were assured that all information provided would remain confidential and would be anonymised. All names including those of people, places and the provision have been changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The data gathered were kept securely with paper records being kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic data stored on an encrypted USB drive.

Prior to and during data collection, the researcher acknowledged the high value they placed on the participant’s views and their contribution to the research. In addition, the researcher acknowledges that the participants were initially contacted about the research by an Innovate manager. It is possible therefore that participants felt obliged to participate. To address any perceived imbalance of power or influence, participants were informed prior to and at the beginning of the interview that they had a right to withdraw at any time, without detriment to themselves and in the case of a young person participant; their learning with Innovate.

4 Findings

This chapter outlines the main research findings in relation to each research question. The quantitative findings are presented within the first section. The second section begins with a brief background to each of the participant groups followed by the findings from the thematic analysis of interviews with participants.

4.1 Quantitative findings

4.1.1 Overview of quantitative findings

Initial analysis of the dataset using descriptive statistics revealed that of the 480 students on roll, 61.3% were male and 38.8% were female. Most students were of White British ethnicity (91.5%), with other ethnic categories making up less than 2% each of the remaining 8.5%. As illustrated in the bar graph below (figure 2), most students studying with Innovate (61%) of were in Key Stage 4, 21.3% were Post 16, 16.7% were Key Stage 3, and the remaining 1% were made up of Key Stage 1 (.2%) and 2 (.8%).

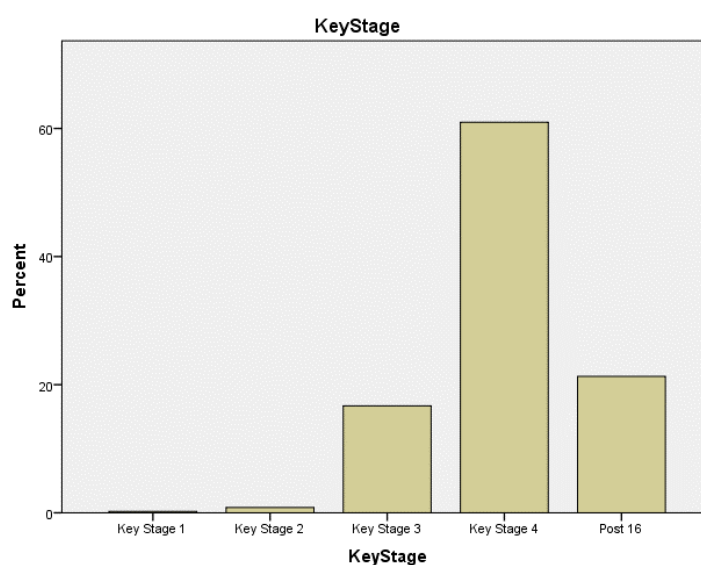


Figure 2: Bar graph illustrating percentage of students at different Key Stages

Table 4.1 below presents the average scores for behaviour and contribution (where 1 = excellent, 2 = good, 3 = satisfactory and 4 = unsatisfactory) as well as percentage attendance for the categories of gender, ethnicity, key stage, and primary category of need. Taken as a whole, the data presented give rise to several cautions relating to the interpretation of the data. A third (33.54%) of the data from both average behaviour and average contribution are missing as well as a fifth (18.54%) from percentage attendance. Whilst this still leaves a good sample size, it is important to consider potential biases; for example, 18.54% missing data for percentage attendance may indicate that a fifth of the students enrolled with Innovate never

Table 4.1: Average scores (behaviour and contribution) and percentage attendance for gender, ethnicity, key stage, and category of need

		Average Behaviour⁴	Average Contribution⁵	Percentage Attendance⁶
Gender	Male	1.04	1.48	42.52%
	Female	1.07	1.52	37.72%
Ethnicity	White British	1.05	1.50	40.80%
	White Other	1.02	1.61	27.55%
	Black British Caribbean	1.02	1.16	50.26%
	Black British African			16.67%
	Black British Other			
	Asian British Bangladeshi	1.17	1.94	61.84%
	Asian British Pakistani	1.01	2.20	53.44%
	Asian British Indian			
	Mixed White & Black Caribbean		1.29	52.75%
	Mixed White & Black African			
	Mixed White & Asian	1.13	1.61	37.20%
	Mixed Other			
	Other	1.08	1.70	32.99%
Key Stage (KS)	KS1			
	KS2	1.00	1.31	50.17%
	KS3	1.04	1.46	41.65%
	KS4	1.06	1.53	41.78%
	Post-16	1.04	1.44	37.65%
Category of Need (primary)	Disaffected	1.02	1.68	41.96%
	EBD (Emotional/ Behavioural)	1.07	1.62	47.02%
	Excluded	1.06	1.58	38.54%
	Medically Ill – CFS/ME	1.05	1.46	44.87%
	Medically Ill - Injuries		1.61	75.33%
	Medically Ill -Anxiety	1.06	1.44	43.11%
	Medically Ill – Social Phobia			21.96%
	Medically Ill - Agoraphobic	1.05	1.40	41.06%
	Medically Ill - Other	1.04	1.59	43.73%
	School Refuser	1.02	1.76	28.59%
	Bullied	1.07	1.54	48.79%
	In Care/Looked After			48.48%
	Learning Difficulties inc. Autism	1.03	1.40	42.97%
	Additional Support (Revision, Booster)	1.05	1.46	41.37%
	Disabled		1.08	51.52%

⁴ Where 1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Satisfactory and 4 = Unsatisfactory. There was 33.54% missing data from Average Behaviour.

⁵ Where 1 = Excellent, 2 = Good, 3 = Satisfactory and 4 = Unsatisfactory. There was 33.54% missing data from Average Contribution.

⁶ There was 18.54% missing data from Percentage Attendance.

attended any live lessons and as such they did not have any data recorded for average behaviour and contribution. Where data is missing for average behaviour and contribution but includes percentage attendance, the data reveals 0% attendance at live lessons. Therefore, the data suggests that a third of students enrolled never attended live lessons. It may be some students only ever access the recorded lessons, for example if using for revision purposes or those who are medically ill, however, no data regarding the use of recorded lessons was available.

In relation to average behaviour, analysis of descriptive statistics suggests that there was less variance in scores from 1 (*excellent*) to 4 (*unsatisfactory*) with 316 of the 319 average behaviour scores being between 1 and 2. This result suggests that teachers tended to give positive scores for behaviour for those students attending live lessons. It may be that student's behaviour in lessons is positive and that those students logging into live lessons

demonstrate a motivation to engage with their learning. Qualitative data from the teacher interviews suggests that they only implemented measures to manage behaviour online, on occasion. It may also be that teachers want to be supportive and encouraging; staff qualities which were highlighted in the qualitative findings relating to the organisation's ethos and are reluctant to give student's scores of 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory' unless necessary.

4.1.2 Quantitative findings linking to research question one

Research question one explored 'How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?'. Following data screening, non-parametric inferential statistical analyses were carried out to investigate the relationship between percentage attendance and average behaviour, and percentage attendance and average contribution, and the differences between percentage attendance and category of need, average behaviour and category of need, and average contribution and category of need. A Kruskal-Wallis test showed no significant difference in percentage attendance between the different categories of need: ($X^2 = 12.424$, $df = 15$, $p = .67$). This result suggests that attendance in live lessons is as accessible to young people enrolled, regardless of their identified category of need.

Spearman's rho correlation on percentage attendance and average contribution showed a significant relationship ($\rho = .154$, $p = .006$, $N = 319$). However, only 2% of the variance in reported contribution is explained by variance in attendance, which may be less than expected if it is postulated that teachers are more likely to give positive contribution scores to those who attend Innovate more. However, taking into account qualitative findings; that teachers are very understanding and accepting of student needs, it may be that teacher's frame of

reference for contribution takes into account sporadic attendance, for example, they may not expect students to sign in for every live lesson if they are medically ill. Teachers noted that students who might not always be able to log in to the live lesson could access the recorded lesson later, at a time that was more convenient for them.

Spearman's rho correlation on percentage attendance and average behaviour showed no significant relationship with $p = .109$, $N = 319$.

A Pearson χ^2 analysis of the difference between average behaviour and category of need showed no significance, Pearson $\chi^2 (N = 195) = 754.52$, $p = .586$. A Pearson χ^2 analysis was repeated with average contribution and category of need and also showed no significance; $\chi^2 (N = 195) = 2112.29$, $p = .156$. These results suggest that neither average behaviour nor average contribution scores differ across the categories of need. As these scores are only given for attendance at live lessons, it may be that regardless of identified category of need, students who log in to attend live lessons (and therefore receive a score for behaviour and contribution) demonstrate a motivation to engage with their learning.

4.2 Qualitative findings

This section outlines the findings from thematic analysis of the interviews with participants. Thematic maps are presented linking to the research question and illustrating the structure and hierarchy of the themes. Each thematic map is followed by a description of the themes which are illustrated by quotes from the participants.

4.2.1 How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?

Findings from analysis of the participant interviews suggested four basic themes regarding the effectiveness of Innovate: stakeholder satisfaction, personal gains of young person, notion of 'successful student', and reported results (as illustrated in figure 3).

4.2.1.1 Stakeholder satisfaction

This section considers areas of stakeholder satisfaction regarding the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting young people's learning. It incorporates; provision is valued, ease of set up and use, and progress of young person.

4.2.1.1.1 Provision is valued

The parents and customer were complimentary about Innovate as a provision. *"I just think it's fantastic"* (Parent A). *"Innovate have given so much to the boys...it's just been brilliant for them"* (Parent B). *"I think they do a really good job"* (Jane). Jane indicated that her setting had

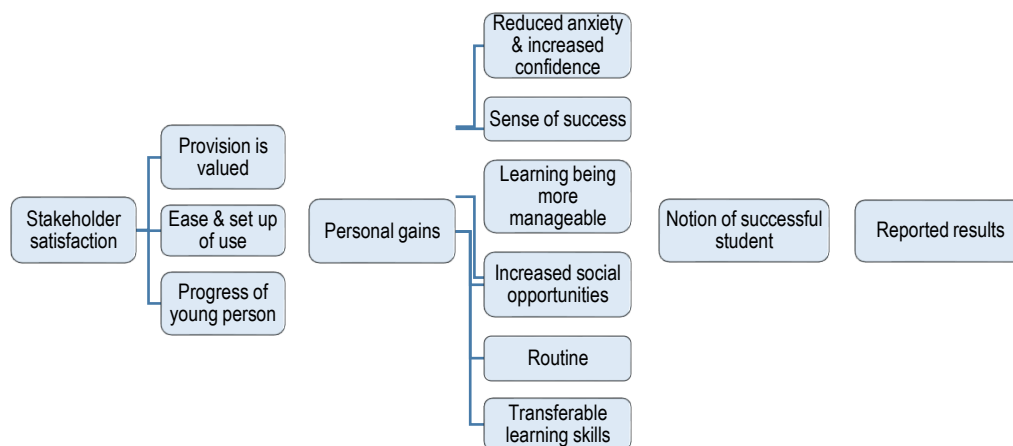


Figure 3: Thematic map relating to research question 1; the effectiveness of Innovate

initially trialled Innovate with one student, two years previous. Both Jane and the student had been pleased with the provision in general and so Jane’s setting was gradually increasing their use of Innovate as they were able. *“We did it just for a term to begin with and then when Emma herself was reporting back that she was finding it a really good way to learn...we went for the whole year...this year we’ve got two children doing it...and we will expand”* (Jane).

Both Jane and parents suggested that Innovate provided a positive alternative education to support the young person’s learning, where other provision had been limited or not viable for the young person due to their ill health or other factors. *“I would say to anybody who’s got kids, for whatever reason, that this is a good alternative”* (Parent B).

“It gives them more, ‘cause like I said, home tuition is only five hours a week...John’s not even entitled to it ‘because he doesn’t have a clinical diagnosis of anything...so for him, it just keeps him working on the days he’s not coming in. But for Emma and James, it just tops up what they’re getting from the home tutor service, which wasn’t a huge amount” (Jane).

Furthermore, they suggested that Innovate provided a ‘lifeline’ for young people where other options had been exhausted, and enabled access to education they may otherwise not have had; *“well if she didn’t have it, she wouldn’t have anything at all”* (Parent A), *“it gives them an education that they wouldn’t get”* (Jane). Jane suggested this supported her students to maintain their connection with education and enabled her setting to meet their needs by providing access to an education package that worked for them. *“So, I think for all three of them, for different reasons...it’s just kept them in touch with education when they could easily have just got lost a little bit”* (Jane).

“It fills a real need, for the sorts of children I’m talking about where you haven’t got any other options, at least you’re providing...you can say that they’re educated off-site so they can get a B...rather than getting swathes of unauthorised absence or just medical all the time, they are actually down as being educated, which is something they couldn’t have accessed in the past...so yeah, I’ve been really pleased with them; they’ve been really good” (Jane).

Finally, Jane suggested that as a customer, an appealing aspect of the provision was that it could offer accreditation for students that were finding it difficult to attend school.

“We do a lot of alternative provision but we’re always looking for something that gives accreditation at the end. So, for her to do a proper GCSE as well, which often once you’re out of school is hard to do...so that’s how we started off with them” (Jane).

When asked if they thought the young person valued Innovate, the teachers each said yes and offered their observations as to why this was the case. They suggested that the young people demonstrated positive engagement in their learning, through their contributions in lessons and beyond, as well as their motivation to challenge themselves. Speaking about David, his teacher Helen said; *“just through the sheer amount of effort he puts in...how he communicates with the other students...if you go into our forums...David is there, commenting...always submits things for the student magazine” (Helen).* Speaking about Abigail, her teacher Callum felt she contributed well in lessons; *“her intelligence and humour come through...she shows initiative by wanting to participate without being picked” (Callum).* Brian’s teacher Arthur said that he often asked for extra work and would do independent revision because he enjoyed the subject.

“We’re doing...balancing equations...he did the sheet and he was like ‘can I have some more?’. I was like ‘yeah sure’ and gave him some more and he said, ‘I’m really enjoying these, can I have some more?’, so I gave him some A-level ones to do. Got them done and I was like ‘gee, you’re up to my level now Brian, I can’t really take you much further!’ (laughs)” (Arthur).

Both Harry and Helen also spoke about positive communication with parents; particularly where the parent was very involved in their child’s learning, in terms of being supportive of the pupil, and complimentary about the provision and the staff. They suggested that parents indicated their satisfaction with their child’s progress and the provision in general. *“I just remember saying to his Mum, she said ‘oh we’re really proud of David, thank you for being his teacher’...so we’ve got that relationship with the parents as well I think, especially if they are invested as much as Mr & Mrs B are” (Helen).* Harry said that some parents *“comment on how*

amazed they've been of the progress of their kid, compared to when they were in a mainstream setting. You know it's really nice to hear that...you've really made such a difference in the view of the parent" (Harry).

4.2.1.1.2 Ease of set up and use

The young people suggested that the initial set up process with Innovate was good. Once enrolled they were given induction sessions via phone and using the online classrooms to learn how the VLP operated and how to use it. Both parents also received an online induction to the VLP by a member of staff; one on an individual basis and one as part of a group induction. When asked if they felt they had received sufficient information about the VLP and how it worked prior to their child commencing their learning with Innovate, they each indicated that they were satisfied with the information they had received.

"Yes, yeah. I actually asked for an induction course...Samantha [Regional Manager] went through it with me...so I could see how good it could be, you know, before Cameron even started" (Parent B).

Having received their induction, young people suggested that the VLP was easy to use; *"it's very easy to work your way around on Innovate"* (Cameron), *"it's not as yet been complicated in any way"* (Brian).

4.2.1.1.3 Progress of young person

As well as their satisfaction towards the provision, parents also expressed their pleasure in seeing their child progress and achieve whilst learning with Innovate. *"We're so pleased with how they are interacting and progressing, you know, you can just see it on their faces, how happy they are and that they enjoy their lessons"* (Parent B). *"I mean Cameron has done...his level one English this year...and he's just passed his level one maths, so we're really chuffed"* (Parent B). Parent A also suggested there had been a positive impact on her child's self-esteem since she started with Innovate. *"She's doing very well on the course, so she doesn't feel as stupid as when she couldn't go to school"* (Parent A).

4.2.1.2 Personal gains

This section considers the effectiveness of Innovate in terms of personal gains experienced by young people. It incorporates; reduced anxiety and increased confidence, sense of success, learning being more manageable, increased social opportunities, routine, and transferable learning skills.

4.2.1.2.1 Reduced anxiety and increased confidence

A reduction in young people's anxiety and an increase in their self-confidence was highlighted across participant groups. When asked whether Innovate had made a difference to their child parents said, *"Oh yes. Definitely. Yeah, it's the independence and the confidence"* (Parent B). *"Oh massively, massively. I think her confidence and self-esteem"* (Parent A). Parents and teachers suggested that prior to Innovate, young people often struggled with confidence; perhaps due to the impact of their illness and others' understanding of this, and in relation to their previous experiences of education.

"I think particularly with ME you know, you go to the hospital and they go 'oh dear, we don't know what to do with you' and we go to school and they don't know what to do with her...there's a big thing about it being psychological...there's always that underlying accusation. So...it really undermines your confidence to have that condition" (Parent A).

"It's nice to see somebody grow into quite a well-rounded individual, compared to how you see someone when they first come here, which is usually that they lack confidence because... they feel that they've been the ones who have been unable to fit into mainstream education...they feel they're the let-down...and to see someone who feels like that, turn into somebody who's really confident...is just great" (Harry).

The development of self-confidence was attributed to Innovate's pedagogy as well as a sense of success experienced whilst learning with Innovate; *"you know she's getting one hundred percents and ninety percents, so it's very important for her self-confidence"* (Parent A), *"it definitely gave her the confidence to keep working"* (Jane), *"he's getting more confident, doing better"* (Jane).

"I've seen Cameron grow massively...in his ability and his confidence as well. And I think that his confidence level has only grown because of, well as a result of Innovate's way of teaching really because he wouldn't bat an eyelid at sending me an email asking for further clarification, or...for a one-to-one, whereas at early stages he wouldn't, he would just be silent, and I'd really have to dig hard to find out whether he truly understood something or not" (Harry).

"And his confidence with doing things and sharing things...has come on a lot. So, he used to do things and send it to me...and I'd be like 'David, do you want to share it?' and it would be like 'em, okay but I don't want to go first'. Now it's; 'who wants to share?', 'Me, me, I want to go first, I want to show mine!'" (Helen).

The accessibility of the provision, in terms of being able to access it from the comfort of home, and the availability of asynchronous learning, were factors which enabled young people to worry less about falling behind due to their illness. *“You don’t have to worry about falling behind at any point because it’s all there for you to access when you need it”* (Brian). *“I can just do the lesson in my pyjamas and not worry if I’m lagging behind”* (Cameron).

“I think it’s definitely made a difference...for Emma when she started...it was something she could do, because she was so frustrated at not being able to access education. She kept coming back [to school] to try and then would go downhill again...it was awful. So, for her it was really good that she was able to do it” (Jane).

Abigail’s parent suggested that her illness and misperceptions around it had affected her self-confidence. For Abigail, learning with Innovate enabled a degree of anonymity which allowed her to grow in self-confidence and to contribute to lessons more than she might have done in school:

“When I was at school, I wouldn’t put my hand up as much and I wouldn’t sort of put myself forward as much, but because it is Innovate and there’s no-one there to stare at you when you put your hand up...I put myself forward a lot more” (Abigail).

Accessibility of the provision and anonymity for the young person, were also factors which the Chief Operations Manager suggested could overcome barriers to learning and contribute to reduced feelings of anxiety and increased self-confidence for some young people.

“This person might be an agoraphobic person or an elective mute who just doesn’t engage with anybody at all, doesn’t leave their bedroom. But actually...they’re able to go on and just text and still learn, and it’s a smaller step, a less scary step towards interaction in real society for them and suddenly it’s a lifeline and suddenly they just go ‘oh’ and a lot of the internal psychological barriers tend to break down and they just go whom” (Chief Operations Manager).

4.2.1.2.2 Sense of success

A further personal gain attributed to learning with Innovate was the young person’s sense of success. Young people and parents related this specifically to the young person’s personal achievements and attainments; *“using Innovate and the help of my teachers, I have passed two exams”* (Cameron). David also said; *“when I joined the Innovate my grades went up”*. Parents indicated that learning with Innovate had enabled their children to feel a sense of achievement again, following a period where they had found it difficult to access their learning at school due to their illness. These personal achievements had been recognised through awards and

accreditations their child had received. *"I think the main thing for both of them is that it's helping them achieve...the fact that Cameron as been able to pass his exams is testament isn't it really?"* (Parent B). *"She got student of the week once...so she were absolutely thrilled"* (Parent A).

Jane suggested that a positive and successful learning experience with Innovate had increased her student's engagement with mainstream school. *"He has started coming back into school...I think the fact that he felt positive about what was going on, with his online, he's now started coming back in"* (Jane). *"And James again that got him re-engaged, back in, sufficiently so he'll come back for his computer science after school...which he wouldn't do previously"* (Jane).

"It was getting to the point where he was getting so stressed and so anxious, he just couldn't come to school...so we set him up with his Science and English. Since he's got back engaged with learning again, he's actually coming in [to school]" (Jane).

4.2.1.2.3 Learning being more manageable

Young people were asked about their experience of using Innovate compared to attending school and they reflected on this in relation to their illness. They suggested that due to the impact of their illnesses, learning online provided an accessibility and flexibility to their learning which was better suited to their needs and less taxing on them. *"If I wasn't ill, school would be fine...but because I'm ill Innovate's much better...I don't find it as hard work due to my illness"* (Abigail). *"Before I came to Innovate, I was actually kinda struggling...but having Innovate, it means I've always got that kind of access to an education of some sort"* (Brian).

Jane suggested that for two of her students, being able to access the provision from home and contribute as much or as little as they were comfortable with, meant that learning was more manageable and afforded them a sense of control over their learning experience; *"at one point, James, he couldn't, he wouldn't put his uniform on, he couldn't come to school, he couldn't face school, but he could sit in front of his computer"* (Jane). *"If John particularly thought he had to contribute that would've stopped him, he wouldn't have used it in the first place"* (Jane).

Parent B suggested that being able to let their teacher know when they need to leave a lesson and have this fully accepted by the teacher, enabled a more manageable learning experience for her children and increased their confidence:

"If you're at mainstream school you're pushed and pushed and pushed, they're not pushed at Innovate, they do what they can do and if they can't do anymore that's fine, there's no issues, there's no problem....they both know that if they need to go, they can

just say 'right I need to go' and the teacher is 'yep, fine, no problem'...for them it's having that confidence knowing that if they need to stop they can stop" (Parent B).

4.2.1.2.4 Increased social opportunities

Two of the young people suggested that using Innovate had increased their access to social opportunities to meet and talk with peers, compared to learning with a home tutor. They felt that learning in groups with other young people, as well as access to social areas within the VLP had facilitated this. *"When I had my tutor, I couldn't interact with any other students, whereas at Innovate I have made new friends" (David), "sometimes I go into [the chatroom] and chat" (David).*

Cameron's teacher Harry felt that access to social opportunities online had supported his personal development *"on a social level...the way he interacts with other people in the classroom has actually developed as well. You know he's made friends here...friends who he maintains contact with outside of the lessons" (Harry).*

4.2.1.2.5 Routine

Both parents said that Innovate provided a helpful routine for their child which they may not have had otherwise, particularly due to the impact of their illness which meant that the young people spent much of their time at home. *"It's something they always do each day, it's a bit of a routine for them" (Parent B). "It's a routine for her, she would have no routine in her life at all without it, there'd be nothing...so that's very good" (Parent A).*

4.2.1.2.6 Transferable learning skills

Two of the teachers suggested that young people had developed transferable learning skills relating to ICT and collaborative working. Speaking about David, his teacher Helen said that he had made very good progress in English including his spelling and grammar but also the organisation and presentation of his work. *"Like even just, he's only writing stories or something, but you can see the way that he puts it together or he's put it on a powerpoint, the things he includes, it's helping his IT skills as well" (Helen).* Abigail's teacher Callum said:

"Abigail also developed her social and collaborative skills in class, often working on group tasks where negotiation was necessary, before collating information using IT and reporting back to the class a whole. These are useful skills which students often overlook in the quest for 'subject' skills" (Callum).

4.2.1.3 Notion of 'successful student'

This section considers the notion of 'successful student' when considering young people for whom the provision is perceived to be most effective.

As a customer, Jane and her setting had carefully considered students who may benefit from enrolling with Innovate. Those included students for whom other options had been exhausted or were limited. Another important factor that Jane considered when selecting students was their motivation to learn, which she suggested was important to both the success of the provision for the student and the value for money which her setting received. *"We trialled them [Innovate] last year for the first time, with one girl who got really severe ME...she was a really good person to start off with because she's very bright, very self-motivated"* (Jane). *"I knew she was very well motivated...she had university all planned out and everything. So that was a good one to start with"* (Jane). *"He's a bright boy so he needs channelling, and he still feels as if he's doing something worthwhile, 'because he knows he's headed for a GCSE"* (Jane).

"There's other children out there who would benefit, but what we've gone for is the real severe cases who we think will get the most benefit, so we've got some out there that aren't fit, but also aren't motivated in the same way...so the ones we've gone with are the ones we think we'll get value for money" (Jane).

The Chief Operations Manager also postulated that medically ill students did well with Innovate because they were typically determined to learn and motivated to achieve.

"Medical students are typically, to generalise, much better students because...typically they want to learn, because of some circumstance beyond their control they've been taken out of their learning and so they're really desperate for something, so they tend to work better and harder" (Chief Operations Manager).

Jane suggested that the provision might be more successful for those students who enjoyed using ICT; *"James...he's a bit computer mad anyway"* (Jane), which the Chief Operations Manager acknowledged was a common assumption. However, he suggested that despite this, the effectiveness of the provision was more to do with meeting individual needs.

"You know a lot of the time we've had customers saying 'yes it'll work for this student, definitely, they'll love it' and 'oh no this one won't, I really don't think it will' and it'll be the opposite...often the assumption is based on technology...people think 'Johnny is always playing his video games and he loves that sort of thing, so he'll love online learning'...and the reality is that they're not actually looking into the real circumstances"

of the individual and the emotional circumstances more than anything” (Chief Operations Manager).

He further suggested that the students who were most likely to be successful with the provision, were those who received appropriate support to address their wider needs; *“it’s the ones that have got proper support that are most successful, absolutely, guaranteed...learning mentors, whatever other psychological, social support they need for their circumstances”* (Chief Operations Manager).

4.2.1.4 Reported results

This section considers the results Innovate reports regarding the effectiveness of the provision.

The Chief Operations Manager indicated that the figures and results they had been able to report demonstrated that Innovate was an effective alternative provision for young people absent from school. *“So, a year ago we got to the stage where we were confident that we had more than enough data to prove, beyond any reasonable doubt...that this does work”* (Chief Operations Manager). Innovate had experienced a dip in their results over the previous three years, which he attributed to changes in their student population and the way in which their results had been reported. Providing more contextual information enabled a better understanding of their reported results.

“We did report them in the same sort of table as mainstream school, which is not quite right at all, but even so we were getting results that were equivalent to or greater than the national average for an average school for a cohort that was exclusively medical or behavioural...we are changing the way we report our figures because...in the last three years...our results dipped. But the reason for that is...three years ago we were 100% medical...the percentages from just last year are 35% medical and 65% behavioural...so the results are still really, really good if you split them and put them into context” (Chief Operations Manager).

4.2.2 What are the perceived facilitators/barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate?

Two thematic networks are used to answer this question; the first relating to the perceived facilitators and the second relating to the perceived barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate.

4.2.2.1 Facilitators

Eight main themes emerged relating to perceived facilitators; flexibility, personalised approach, organisational ethos, secure learning environment, control over teaching and

learning experience, access to social opportunities, dependability, and use of ICT (as illustrated in figure 4).

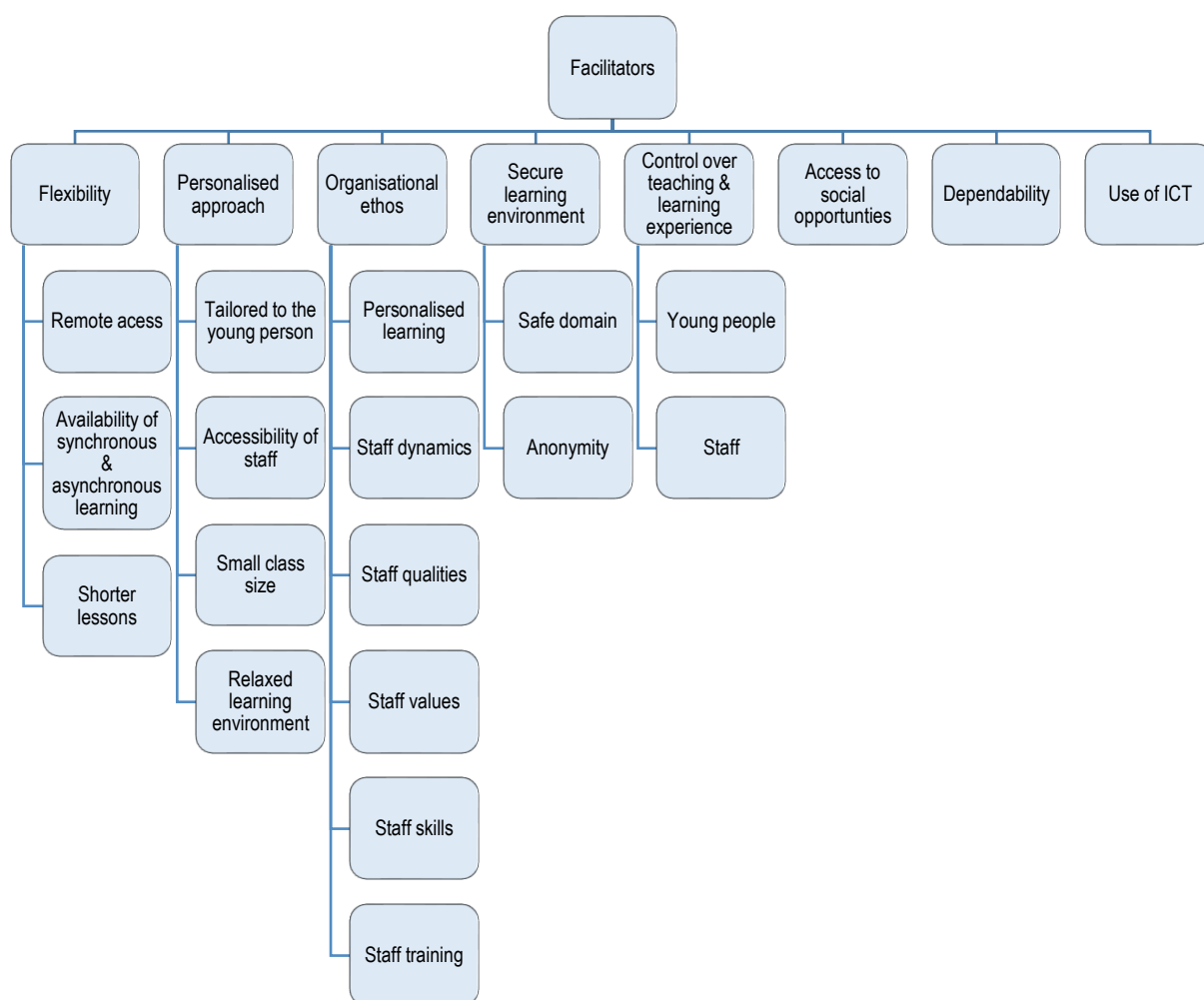


Figure 4: Thematic network of perceived facilitators to the effectiveness of Innovate

4.2.2.1.1 Flexibility

This section considers the flexibility of learning experience in relation to meeting the needs of the young people. It incorporates remote access, availability of synchronous and asynchronous learning, and shorter lessons.

4.2.2.1.1.1 Remote access

Participants suggested that the ability to access Innovate remotely (provided there is a suitable internet connection), was a facilitative factor in the effectiveness of the provision. For young people, parents, and the customer, being able to access Innovate from the comfort of home enabled young people to continue to engage with their learning whilst managing the impact of their illness or circumstances which were challenging for them. *“Even if I’m ill at Innovate, I’m*

still able to go to their lesson, and just not speak and just watch” (Abigail). “And for some of the ones that we’ve had, just staying at home in an environment where they feel comfortable, where they’re not having to put a uniform on” (Jane). “Well John particularly, he is just not fit to come into school all the time...so the fact that he can still learn, and still do something productive and be at home” (Jane). “She went through...a real big re-programming of her body clock...so every single morning, regardless of how tired she was, she had to go to Northtown hospital. But that wore her out because she’d have to be there at eight o’clock, then she’d have to come with Mum and drive her to school. So sometimes she just had to carry on at home with Innovate, because it was just too much” (Jane).

Compared to attending a school, access from home enabled young people to reduce the demands and effort needed to be up and ready and to travel to school, which impacted on their ability to engage with their learning. *“If I was going to school the trip there alone would make me ill and over tired, then I would have to go home; with Innovate I can just do the lesson in my pyjamas” (Cameron). “I don’t have to spend energy putting make-up on...the fact that it’s online and I don’t have to...I could be half asleep in bed and I could still be online” (Abigail).*

Parents suggested that home access also alleviated some of the pressures and anxieties relating to their child’s learning experience. *“All they’ve got to do is come downstairs, or on their laptop in bed, and just get on with the lesson, you know, there’s no sort of pressure as such” (Parent B).*

“It’s just the fact that, she hasn’t got the energy to get to school...she doesn’t even have to get dressed to go on Innovate; she can do it in her pyjamas. So that’s good, and they can’t see her. And she does look quite shocking some days...so for her, you know as a teenage girl, the fact that they can’t see her is very...it’s not something she has to worry about, how she looks...at that age I think that’s quite important” (Parent A).

Arthur suggested that accessing the provision from home was helpful to the young person and that ICT enabled regular communication.

“We have regular email contact...it’s quite good we’ve got the internet and email platform to do that. It makes things a lot easier, for him as well. Because he can be in his home obviously that’s where he spends a lot of his time” (Arthur).

Teachers also suggested that remote access enables flexibility of the learning location so that young people can log in from home, school, or another setting; and teachers are able to teach their lessons to several young people in different geographical locations. *“One of the things which is a real benefit...is being able to reach these learners pretty much anywhere. You could*

live on top of a hill in the middle of nowhere, and as long as there's an internet signal it's not a problem" (Harry). "We had this kid last year...a [sportsperson] I think, so he did his lessons in the car on the way to different parts of the country, because he was never in one spot" (Arthur). "Sometimes I think 'wow, in this group I've got a child down in X and a child up in Y'" (Arthur).

4.2.2.1.1.2 Availability of synchronous and asynchronous learning

Alongside scheduled live lessons, participants talked about the benefits of access to recorded lessons and extra course materials which are available at any time and can also be downloaded. The availability of asynchronous learning means that young people never have to miss out on their lesson and are better able to manage their illness when necessary; they can tailor their learning to meet their needs. *"I think the flexibility is really good, in that, obviously you could have your lessons, within reason, whenever it suits you" (Jane). For young people, flexible access to their learning alleviates any sense of 'falling behind'. "If you ever feel like you've missed something, or you haven't got any of the information, it's all there in the class site...it's all there for you to access it when you need it, whenever you need it" (Brian). "Sometimes I miss a lesson because I'm not feeling very well, but the good thing is that I can watch the recording when I feel better and catch up on the lesson that I missed" (Cameron). "And I know that he does watch the recordings if he misses a lesson for whatever reason, 'cause sometimes he has hospital appointments and things like that...so he does catch up" (Arthur). "With the medically ill students, a lot of their body clocks are asleep throughout the day and awake through the night. So, they'll watch the recordings" (Regional Manager).*

"David is a student with ME...I think it supports him because it allows him that flexibility. He does quite often log in and say; 'I'm really tired today', or 'I've got a pain in my fingers' or 'in my eyes'...he always watches the recordings if he needs to log out, so it offers him that flexibility" (Helen).

Parents suggested that the availability of asynchronous learning was a unique and efficient feature of Innovate which had not been possible with previous provisions. *"Well, it's really good that she can play back, if she's quite ill in the lesson, she can play back... you know there's no way you can play back a lesson that you've been to in school" (Parent A).*

"They have the recording as well that they can sit back and go over, which is brilliant because you know, they used to have home tutors and if they weren't well enough that lesson is missed, so they've lost a lesson. Whereas because it's recorded it's always there...so you know in our mindset, it's more economical to use Innovate than it ever was having home tutors" (Parent B).

Teachers and managers also suggested that asynchronous learning provided opportunities to revisit and consolidate learning and support revision. Helen compared this to school:

“Just the freedom to watch a recording. If you don’t understand something, how often could you in school go back and do your lesson again, it’s not going to happen is it? Unless the teacher has time to do it...maybe if they do feel a bit insecure about ‘I didn’t understand that lesson, oh right well she’s gonna upload the recording afterwards anyway, I can watch it again and see if it makes more sense to me’” (Helen).

“They’ve got access to watch the whole library of lessons...they’ve got access to the links they might have used, access to the websites or content that the teachers have used. They’ve obviously got all their assignments...that they’ve done as well, to go back to refresh. So, for the long-term student, the revision side of things, when they’re with Innovate is very good” (Regional Manager).

4.2.2.1.1.3 Shorter lessons

Participants suggested that shorter lessons of 30 minutes; a deliberate choice made by Innovate, enabled young people to better manage their needs and enabled a more effective learning experience. For young people who were medically unwell, shorter lessons were helpful in reducing the impact of their illness and enabling them to better cope: *“with my illness, it’s hard to concentrate and remember things...the lessons are only half an hour, which has made a big difference” (Cameron).* *“His health, it was deteriorating, and he had to have some of his time [with home tutors] dropped back because it was too much...we thought this would be a good way forward because it’s half hour lessons” (Parent B).* *“It’s definitely down to the fact that lessons aren’t as long. That’s really helped them” (Parent B).* *“I think the fact that they are small, bitesize is quite good” (Jane).*

“A lot of our kids do have problems with things like becoming fatigued or attention span, you know it’s the reason we chose half hour sessions...I think that difference between that and a mainstream school is a really big one for them. You know it means a lot to them. It enables them to be able to stay focused...and learn more effectively because, beyond that time there’s really little point if they’re not able to concentrate” (Harry).

Abigail also suggested that shorter lessons were helpful in relation to the social dynamics of the lesson; *“it’s only half an hour so it’s not time to build up an argument with anybody I suppose” (Abigail).*

4.2.2.1.2 Personalised approach

This section considers the personalised approach adopted by Innovate which includes; tailored to the young person, accessibility of staff, small class size, and relaxed learning environment.

4.2.2.1.2.1 Tailored to the young person

Being able to tailor learning to meet young people's needs was another factor which participants suggested facilitated its effectiveness. For some young people this was about an optimal time of day for lessons, to best suit their health needs. *"His lesson with me is actually half four. So, it's quite late on, he doesn't have morning lessons or anything"* (Arthur).

"One of the reasons why I particularly wanted and liked the way they were operating, was Emma had a dreadful time in the morning because she would stay awake a lot of the night because of the condition. But would only really be fit to do anything by four o'clock. So, we could tailor her lessons to whenever she needed it" (Jane).

For others, it was about staff having a good understanding of the young person and adapting learning where necessary; *"the teachers understand how my illness makes me feel...I need to leave when I need to leave"* (Cameron). David compared his Innovate teachers and his previous home tutor in relation to understanding his needs:

"When I had a tutor, it was really hard because if I wanted to stop I couldn't, I wasn't allowed, I was told to do just a little bit more...and made my illness make me feel worse. [My Innovate teachers] let me leave the lesson and I would just watch the recording later...they understand me more and how my illness affects me" (David).

The sharing of relevant information (including medical or wellbeing needs and topics of learning relating to religious beliefs or which the person may find difficult for personal reasons), was key to ensuring the learning experience was tailored to the individual. *"I think it's just a more personalised experience because from the very get-go, we know the background of the kids...which enables us to connect with them more"* (Harry). *"Cameron has ME and he gets fatigued very easily, and in mainstream school...he wouldn't be learning as much as our approach which is more sort of personalised"* (Harry).

"For the ones we get a lot of information about, it can be really useful, especially if they've got certain issues they don't like to talk about...we do have a few cases where you do have to be careful what you say to them, or the kind of topics that they study...we've got a couple of students where their parents have requested they don't study big bang and all that kind of stuff in science" (Helen).

Parent B spoke positively about staff and the impact that Innovate's tailored approach had on her child's learning experience *"all the teachers are really good if there are any issues...they're like 'right well we can try this, we can drop back on that' so you know you can always call up and get things sorted"* (Parent B).

4.2.2.1.2.2 Accessibility of staff

Teachers suggested that they were *"much more accessible to the student, than...in a mainstream school"* (Helen) which enabled a very personalised approach. Harry suggested that the accessibility of staff was in part due to the provision remaining 'open' online later than a typical school day. *"It's highly personalised...we're contactable for more than your standard nine until three, three thirty, you know we're here until five, five days a week"* (Harry).

Communicating online appeared to facilitate both staff accessibility and ease of communication for students. Students were able to email staff at any time. When asked about what was helpful about Innovate in supporting Abigail, Callum said *"the ability to contact me via email at any time of the day or night"*. Harry suggested that getting in contact with the teacher, should they need to, was encouraged *"they can email the teacher as I always encourage them to do. You know if they have any questions, so that's a real plus"* (Harry). Young people valued the ease of using email, and the responsiveness of staff. *"If I'm stuck on something, where at a normal school you can't go down and ask someone to help you. But at innovate you can just email them and, yeah"* (David). Abigail compared this to her experience of school; *"at my last school nobody, none of the teachers had time to be bothered [getting] back...but with Innovate because it's all online I get an email response all the time"* (Abigail). Jane valued the availability of staff in supporting her students when they needed it, which she felt was better compared to home tutors:

"If you get stuck with something, unless your Mum and Dad are able to help, you know the tutor's only there for such a short time. Once they've gone, you're floundering a little bit, so Innovate's been quite good in that they can text and they can email, they can ask, you know if they're getting stuck" (Jane).

Staff also made themselves available for one-to-one sessions with students should they need it; *"we offer quite a number of one-to-ones, which is again a more personalised approach...all of our teachers here in their spare time do give extra one-to-ones for our kids"* (Harry). Brian spoke positively about staff being readily available to provide one-to-ones when he felt he needed them as well as the ease of requesting these. *"It's pretty much unlimited so you just ask them, and they'll set up the time, send you when, and then you just turn up"* (Brian).

4.2.2.1.2.3 Small class size

Parent A suggested that the small group learning was beneficial for her child as it enabled a more manageable and less demanding learning experience. *“It’s good because there are not many people in her class at Innovate and I think she would be completely overwhelmed if there were 30 people, sitting in a class, all speaking at the same time, she couldn’t cope with it all”* (Parent A). *“There’s about five people in Abigail’s class...it’s a lot easier for her”* (Parent A).

Teachers suggested that small class sizes enabled them to get to know their students better and to be more accessible to them. *“But here you get to know all the kids...you’ve got ten maximum in your class”* (Arthur). *“I think the personal interaction with us, we are much more accessible to the student than I ever felt as a teacher in a mainstream school. And small class sizes help with that”* (Helen). Arthur also suggested that small class sizes enabled him to use students’ shared interests within the lessons which encouraged more collaborative learning and social connections amongst peers.

“So trying to get their interests in...because you’ve got small class sizes you can do that kinda thing...in literacy...I’ve got maybe two or three groups, kids with different interests, so you can say ‘right you lot go and find out about this, you lot do that...and then we’ll come back and share with each other’. And they learn about, not just the literacy skills, but about other areas of their lives that they didn’t know about” (Arthur).

4.2.2.1.2.4 Relaxed learning environment

Both young people and teachers suggested that Innovate provided a relaxed and less formal learning environment; *“ease of rapport, no ‘sir’”* (Callum) which facilitated the effectiveness of provision. Staff and students being on a first name basis removed potential barriers relating to perceptions of authority. *“The relationship with the teacher is different with us [Innovate]. The fact that we are on a first name basis, they don’t have to call us ‘Miss’ or ‘Sir’, I think adds that personal touch”* (Helen). *“They know us by our first names rather than our surnames. That’s already breaking down some barriers”* (Arthur).

Staff suggested that the more relaxed environment enabled students to feel at ease and facilitated communication and collaboration between staff and students. *“You get quite friendly with the students, that’s always quite nice...they don’t always see you as a teacher; while you’ve still got that authority, they will come to you in the private chat...”* (Helen)

“Rather than having that barrier of ‘I’m the teacher, you’re the learner’ try and break it down a little but more...it’s a lot more collaborative...they’ll share stuff with you as

well. They're a lot more likely to say; 'I don't understand what you're going on about', than if you were very strict" (Arthur).

Brian suggested that the way his teachers related to him meant that he felt he was treated as an equal:

"The teachers that are with Innovate, they treat you...on a first name basis and you get on really well with them and they'll be a lot more...helpful and generally kind about what you're trying to do and they'll generally understand you better than a teacher than I have had in schools, so it's a lot more...kinda equal if you like" (Brian).

4.2.2.1.3 Organisational ethos

This section considers the organisational ethos of Innovate which includes personalised learning, staff dynamics, staff qualities, staff values, staff skills and staff training.

4.2.2.1.3.1 Personalised learning

The Chief Operations Manager proposed that; *"what we really focus on is personalised learning...our whole company and organisation is developed around the student. And that's quite significant" (Chief Operations Manager).* Students are assigned to classes based on their abilities in core subjects, not by age, and their contextual circumstances are taken into account as much as possible, in order to provide the most effective learning experience. For example, tailoring a young person's learning may include considerations such as timetabling lessons; *"a lot of students who come to us also have other provision, so we have to work the timetables as much as we can. If we can't then they've got to watch the recording" (Regional Manager),* as well as class dynamics, student anxieties and other factors.

"We'll do assessments at the beginning and identify the level of the individual and they'll go in a class like that, so that's quite significant. We'll consider special circumstances as well and timetable accordingly in terms of the class that the individuals go into...medical conditions, circumstances, all sorts of things" (Chief Operations Manager).

"We basically do their literacy; we see what their levels are for English and Maths are. And we use that information to create their timetable...the third session is about health and safety and a bit of like setting goals and finding out what their barriers are...and trying to find out 'have you got this?', 'do you need that?', 'what can we do to help you keep on attending?'" (Regional Manager).

“We’ve got lots of different groups at different levels. And we obviously use their background as well, we have some students who are...elective mutes...or we have some students that are mega anxious, so we wouldn’t put them in a rowdy group or you know, things like that” (Regional Manager).

Innovate also offers flexibility in relation to customer requests for personalised learning, to ensure the best outcomes for young people where possible. This seemed particularly pertinent for young people getting ready to sit exams, or indeed, to leave school.

“We also do things like booster courses as well...we’ve just actually done one for science...for those students who are going to be doing their science exams...’okay so we’ve got this group of ten students who are all borderline D grades, but we feel after speaking to them, these are the topics we would like you to do’, so our science teacher did six weeks on each topic and they had 2 lessons a week of that” (Chief Operations Manager).

As a customer, Jane was keen that her students were able to achieve as many core subjects as possible before they left school.

“So, John does English and Science. Now the reason we picked those subjects, is because we’re trying to get them through all the core subjects...so if they could get English, which was the two; English Language and English Lit., they get their Maths and they get their Science, they’ve straight away got a four” (Jane).

“The ones we chose this time were because both of these boys we’ve got are in year 11, and they only started in the summer of year 10. So, Innovate said, well we can try and do the course for Science in a year, because some of the programmes are obviously two-year programmes” (Jane).

4.2.2.1.3.2 Staff dynamics

Another factor which facilitated the effectiveness of the provision was *“the people. Like I said, we’re all a team, if someone’s struggling with something, we’ll all help out” (Arthur)*. Teachers are very supportive of each other and value each other as equals. *“I think the fact that we are a team is a really big part of it. I don’t think anybody comes in with an ego, or if they do, they leave it at the door (laughs)” (Helen)*. As a team they value each other’s individual ideas as well as working collaboratively. *“Everybody else has so many different ideas and we all just pull them together” (Helen)*.

Helen also suggested that the layout of their work environment contributed to their sense of team and enabled sharing of information to aid live teaching. Their main office in the North of

England is a large open plan space with break out rooms for training, meetings, as well as a kitchen/staff room. Rather than having their own 'classroom' or office, teachers each have a workstation next to each other within the main office.

"We all support each other regardless of the fact that we've got English or Science, I mean if you wandered down the office, we're all mixed in amongst each other. We just sit wherever, and you will hear us even in lessons 'oh did so-and-so say to you earlier this didn't work' or 'did you try this with them'...and we do that quite often...share information with each other" (Helen).

We all have the same lunch, all the teachers, so you'll find us all in the kitchen, gabbing away usually (laughs). But even between lessons, the ten-minute break, we're always down there [at their desks] 'have you tried this one, have you tried that one'...if you've got frees, teachers will often come and sit at this table in here [break out/training room] and work together on planning things or sorting stuff out" (Helen).

Teachers are also encouraged to be forward-thinking, creative, and solution-focused; qualities modelled and expected by Innovate's Chief Executive, who has high expectations for his staff team and the provision.

"I think [the Chief Executive], his drive to do things...sometimes we feel like 'oh goodness...why is he asking us to do this?' but then when you do it, you know why he's asked you to do it. He's always pushing...I think if that ambition wasn't there, if that kind of striving for something that hasn't been tried yet and daring to, then maybe it wouldn't be as good as it is...the more you work with him, the more you realise that actually, that's what makes it all tick and we all take on that mind-set of 'no sod it! I'm going to try it this way!'" (Helen).

"[The Chief Executive] is kinda paving the way in terms of online teaching, so it's kinda alright, a lot of it we have to try and if it doesn't work, you can't have this kind of 'oh I want to be right all the time', that attitude doesn't really work here, you have to be prepared to put yourself out there" (Helen).

4.2.2.1.3.3 Staff qualities

Participants suggested that the personal qualities of staff contributed to a positive learning environment for young people. When asked what personal qualities teachers felt were important for their job, they suggested that interpersonal skills such as *"listening, patience, sensitivity and a wish to journey with the students"* (Callum), enabled them to build relationships with the young people and facilitated the effectiveness of the provision. *"I think I*

can, for some reason, quickly relate to the kids, like instantly find some sort of connection and then as soon as you've got them on your side, you're on to a winner already" (Arthur). When asked how the provision supports her and her learning, Abigail said: "I like it in the way that everybody's...you know... friendly and open-minded...because it's...I'm going to say a school for people in odd situations" (Abigail).

Participants suggested that staff were *"really supportive" (Jane); "the teachers are very supportive" (Brian) and "...they'll help you on pretty much anything you need" (Brian). Staff were viewed as approachable and accommodating; "...if they have any issues, they can just say... 'I don't understand this' and they'll explain it again and they'll always try and find ways to help them understand" (Parent B). "[My teacher] always finds ways to make it easier for me to understand" (Cameron). Parents also suggested that staff readily offered assistance to their child when needed. "I just ring them up and they're helpful. I don't seem to need a specific person. If ever I ring them, they're okay" (Parent A). "She can ring them [technical support] up and say 'help, I can't get into a class'...they were very good at helping her" (Parent A).*

Staff understanding was a further quality noted by several of the participant groups. Teachers suggested that because young people enrolled with Innovate typically had specific needs relating to accessing their learning, that having a genuine understanding of these needs and how to best meet them through the online environment, was key to their role. *"You have to make sure you've got a detailed understanding of all your students, because of the fact that the kinds of kids we get do have specific needs" (Harry).*

"Because of the kind of kids that we get, you've got to have a real understanding and appreciation of the sort of needs they have...and because of those kinds of needs, you've got to be very patient, very understanding..." (Harry).

"And especially if they've got ME or something like that. We're not going to say 'well, where's your work, why haven't you done it? It's supposed to be due today'. We can be a bit more understanding about the fact that, 'well alright, they're probably knackered'" (Helen).

Parents valued staff understanding of their child's illness and how it affected them. *"He knows how it affects Cameron...he looked up about how the illness can impact as well" (Parent B). Parent A compared this with her experience of school: "they're very understanding about her illness, school were incredibly the opposite, they couldn't have been more difficult...so, I just think they [Innovate] have a much better understanding of Abigail's condition" (Parent A). Parent A further suggested that they valued staff discretion and sensitivity around their child's illness, compared to school; "...you know the teachers at school are rude about her illness,*

they're [Innovate] much more sensitive...much more careful about what they say I think"
(Parent A). *"...they don't ever discuss her condition, but they have never dismissed it"* (Parent A).

Feeling understood enabled young people to build positive relationships with staff and helped them to feel accepted. *"It makes a big difference that my teachers understand me"* (Cameron). *"[My relationships with teachers] are easier at Innovate...they understand me more"* (David). *"When I was at school when I was ill, I faced a lot of prejudice and there's none of that at Innovate. And...they have just got a lot of experience with lots of different people, from different backgrounds and such"* (Abigail).

Participants also valued the responsiveness of staff. Young people suggested that teachers were always willing to help, easy to contact via email outside of lesson times and were quick to respond. *"Literally, any problem I've had, that I've asked her, it's been sorted. She gets on to things really quickly and she sorts them out, first time basically"* (Brian). *"I can ring any of them up and they're brilliant, they'll sort it out straight away"* (Parent B). *"I mean with school, she tried to email the teachers and was just completely ignored, so the fact that they respond is really nice"* (Parent A). As a customer, Jane felt the regular communication she received about student's progress was helpful:

"I think it's been really good...in terms of the marking and returning of work straight away and like reporting on things like non-attendance, immediately they don't attend one of the lessons, I get to hear and usually the parents get to hear was well" (Jane).

Parents suggested that staff were encouraging and made a point of providing positive feedback regarding their child's learning and achievements, which had a positive impact on the young people, increasing their confidence. *"Right at the beginning she used to be in touch with Abigail every week and say, 'oh well done', '100% attendance', 'you're doing really well'"* (Parent A). *"I think it just boosts their confidence...you know when the teachers mark their work and they can see how well they're doing and how they're progressing...they've also started doing student of the week...which is really nice, it's a nice incentive"* (Parent B).

David suggested that the staff enabled a sense of fun within his learning environment which had been positive for him: *"[It's] more fun...making friends makes it more fun and the teacher makes me laugh"* (David).

Whilst teachers suggested that being reflective was something they encouraged in their students, they also appeared to model this within their own individual practice; *"but if they know that you are approachable and when they say, 'I haven't got a clue what you've just said'*

you're not going to shout them down; you're going to say; 'oh right, maybe I haven't explained that well'" (Arthur). Reflective practice was also evident within the culture of staff training and professional development.

"We're kinda thinking about creative ways we can get the student involved, interactive learning, but through the online system, so how can we use different parts of the classroom, different resources that we've all got, watching model lessons of each other, we do that on a weekly basis" (Helen).

"Every other Wednesday we meet with Development...so what kind of changes are you putting on the system, how is that going to affect us and our job. Or what do we need that we don't have, that the students would find really useful, so...working across the departments" (Helen).

4.2.2.1.3.4 Staff values

Teachers suggested that they valued both the learner and methods of teaching which aimed to empower the learner. Regarding each of the young people interviewed, their teachers appeared to hold them in high regard, recognising their individual strengths and skills. *"Abigail is particularly talented in English" (Callum). "David has improved absolutely loads...he's really progressed a lot, his English skills have gone through the roof...he puts in so much effort" (Helen). "The kids are often far better with IT than I am (laughs) so I just tend to use their strengths" (Helen).*

Teachers also valued participation and effort from their learners as well as methods of teaching which encouraged young people to be responsible for their learning, to be reflective and to work together. *"I encourage collaborative learning and try to do activities where participation counts, but not towards a 'right' answer...I like to validate student input wherever possible" (Callum). "A lot of my lessons I try to take a back seat, so they're in charge of the learning, they're following it through...they're gonna learn better if it's them that's doing it...I try to get them to go with their own ideas" (Arthur). "I like them to take control over their learning. A lot of 'how have we learnt this?' at the end of sessions as well 'what have we done to get to that end point?'" (Arthur).*

4.2.2.1.3.5 Staff skills

Teachers identified several skills which they felt were important for their role and facilitated the effectiveness of the provision. These largely related to the use of technology for teaching online; with some being specialised to Innovate's unique learning environment. Staff identified competency with the technology as key to ensure a smooth teaching and learning experience.

“As part of the induction process we get familiarised with the technology behind it, because that’s...one of the core set of tools that you’ve got...it can be really, really brilliant, but you’ve got to know how to use it effectively...you can be an outstanding teacher in the classroom, but without the technical knowledge of how to transfer those skills into the virtual world, it’s probably not going to work out too well! (laughs)
(Harry).

Harry also suggested that verbal communication as a skill was essential to the online environment where there is a lack of face-to-face interaction: *“voice is obviously very important when you can’t see the person that you’re talking to, you know pitch and tone...I would say it’s even more important to recognise that when you’re doing virtual teaching”*
(Harry).

Organisation and time management were also key, particularly given that Innovate’s lessons are 30 minutes in duration.

“Our lessons tend to be very organised because they have to be because they are so short. By the time you’ve done your plenaries and your introductions...you’ve only got about 20 minutes or so of actual teaching time...you’ve got to be very organised with what you’re doing, because if you aren’t then you’re not going to cover everything you wanted to get covered and that’s gonna have an effect on the learners obviously”
(Harry).

Harry further suggested an element of accountability to ensuring his lessons were organised; *“everything’s got to be so precise and accounted for, as far as your time management is concerned”* (Harry).

Helen suggested that preparedness and being able to adapt quickly to issues with technology were important skills to ensure quality and continuity of the learning experience for young people.

“I think you have to be very prepared to adapt, on like a minute-to-minute basis. So, for example if the system goes down, or a student tells you ‘I don’t have access to that’...or ‘my computer won’t allow me to do that’ or ‘I don’t know how to do that’ you have to know how to deal with that really quickly and not keep the other ten students waiting”
(Helen).

“And the fact that they’ve got YouTube blocked, or they can’t get on to...I mean you try and be creative and say, ‘let’s play an educational game’, ‘oh, I can’t get on games,

games are blocked', 'right'. So, it does present some challenges, but fortunately we've always got a back-up plan" (Helen).

Adapting teaching to meet learner needs was also identified by Arthur and Harry; *"because of the kind of kids that we get...because of those kinds of needs...you adapt your teaching material as well sometimes" (Harry). "Some of my kids are like 'I don't have a clue what you've just talked about there' and I'm like 'alright, well we'll have a look at it from a different angle'" (Arthur).*

4.2.2.1.3.6 Staff training

Staff training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) appears to be embedded within Innovate's ethos and valued by staff. Each new staff member receives an induction to Innovate which includes initial training about the systems relating to the online learning platform and how to use them. Specific training relating to special educational needs and barriers to learning were mentioned by two of the teachers, as was professional development aimed at Ofsted expectations.

Teachers suggested that training is regular and ongoing; *"we have half an hour every week" (Arthur).* They suggested that continuous improvement of the provision, including overcoming any potential barriers relating to the virtual nature of the teaching and learning experience was *"quite an integral part of our training that we're doing all the time" (Helen).*

"We have CPD activities regularly...just with a view of how to reach that standard of outstanding...but there's always a slant on it as to how we can do that within the confines of a virtual classroom...you need to think about a more tailored approach and that's generally what our CPD activities tend to be about" (Harry).

Training is also collaborative; staff are encouraged to take ownership of the training and to learn from each other, utilising individual strengths and areas of interest. *"We wanted to look at how we can be more creative, well that's what I'm choosing to look at, how we can be more creative, but still maintain the organisation" (Harry). "There isn't one person in charge of doing the training...it's us lot that are learning it and then delivering it to other people" (Arthur). "We had some online training for, everyone split up into different SEN...categories...that was like some online learning...then we had to deliver what we'd learned to each other" (Arthur).*

"We train each other, there's not one person that comes in and says, 'this is what you need to know, and you've got to know it'. It's kind of 'okay, well this is one of your strong points, would you mind leading a session on this?' and we try and learn from each other" (Helen).

4.2.2.1.4 Secure learning environment

This section considers the online provision as being a secure environment in which young people can learn. It incorporates access to a 'safe domain' as well as anonymity for young people.

4.2.2.1.4.1 'Safe domain'

Teachers suggested that one of the benefits of the online learning environment was that it reduced potential barriers relating to social and emotional stressors which might be associated with a physical learning environment and provided a safe online space for young people who needed it. For example, young people who might find a busy classroom or school anxiety-provoking or stressful, or those who have experienced difficulties with peer relationships or bullying. Both lessons and social areas at Innovate are closely monitored and moderated by staff which helps to create a 'safe domain'. *"I hope she [Abigail] could really stretch her wings in class and be herself without worrying about what anybody else thinks of her"* (Callum).

"For certain people, it puts them at ease, they don't want to be in the face of the 'public'...in the classroom environment, and if that helps them be more relaxed then that's a big thing...because if they aren't relaxed, they're not going to do any learning" (Harry).

"Things like peer pressure and bullying and...things which often take place outside of the classroom, outside of the watchful eye of the teacher...we don't have to contend with that because they don't really have that contact outside the classroom and if they do it's moderated by X. I guess it would take away some of the concerns or insecurities that the kids may have" (Harry).

Teachers suggested that the private chat facility provided a safe, confidential space for young people to talk with their teacher. *"They can talk to you in private chat, whereas in a school...their friends are going to know that they've talked to you about something, whereas here, no-one knows"* (Arthur). *"You have that nice little chat which I don't think you always get in a traditional classroom, maybe because they're frightened that somebody's gonna take the mick out of them, I'm not sure"* (Helen). *"They can speak to us privately if they've got anxiety issues, they don't have to contribute to the rest of the group"* (Helen).

4.2.2.1.4.2 Anonymity

Both managers and teachers suggested that one of the factors which facilitated the effectiveness of the provision was the anonymity afforded to young people. Young people log in to the provision from different geographical locations with only their first names identifying

them and being shared with the rest of their group. It is their choice regarding how much personal information they share with others.

“We remove all of the individual identification except your name...you don’t see what I look like in terms of video, real picture, you just know my name and that’s all...and to a certain extent that’s all our teachers know. They know the special circumstances of the medical conditions or whatever, but they don’t know it’s that person from that family, from that estate...so we remove a lot of prejudices and barriers like that so people, like students make friends without a lot of prejudgement...that’s hugely beneficial” (Chief Operations Manager).

They suggested that this helped to remove some of the barriers to learning such as anxiety, or fear of having a certain reputation. *“Sometimes it’s an alias...if they’re protected or they’ve moved authority...they don’t have to worry”* (Regional Manager).

“We have...kids that are scared of school for whatever reason, maybe they’ve been bullied. So, they don’t have to go to that physical place, maybe they’ve got a barrier...whereas here, they’ve got the anonymity, no-one knows who they are, they can just do it in their bedroom...so they can do it wherever they feel comfortable” (Arthur).

They suggested that anonymity also enabled young people to develop new relationships:

“It takes away the judgement...if they’ve...for example in North City been moved from one school to another, someone is going to know that they were from whatever school...where here, there’s no preconceptions, there’s nothing you know, and actually a lot of students make good relationships” (Regional Manager).

4.2.2.1.5 Control over teaching and learning experience

This section considers features of the online provision which enable control over the learning experience, both for young people and for Innovate staff.

4.2.2.1.5.2 Young People

Features of the online provision such as remote access and recorded lessons not only provide flexibility to meet young people’s needs, but also allow them some control over their learning experience. Access from home means that young people have more control over both their online and physical learning environment, giving them the opportunity to *“tune-out annoyances”* (Callum). They can also choose what they access and when. *“They can always watch the recorded lessons...you know, anytime, anywhere”* (Harry). *“They can log in, if they*

don't feel very well, they can watch a recording" (Helen). The online classroom has several communication facilities young people can use which allow them some choice and control regarding how they communicate and who they communicate with. These include a whole class chat facility, a private chat facility between the young person and their teacher, and a feedback button which indicates to the teacher that they need assistance. *"The private chat and the fact that they can do that just with you, they don't have to share it with the rest of the class...although lots of them are still happy to"* (Helen). *"We've got the feedback boxes as well, so they can just click on it, they don't even have to type 'I don't understand', they just press a button...so that's quite useful"* (Arthur).

"It's the private bit as well...these two boys particularly, even in that sort of interactive situation wouldn't, with the headsets and stuff, speak I wouldn't imagine, but they would...send a message to the tutor directly saying; 'I don't get it'" (Jane).

"If they don't like the other students in their class they can just opt not to talk to them, nobody's gonna force them...but quite often they do... 'what did you do at the weekend?', 'what football team do you support?', they all get into debates about that kind of stuff" (Helen).

Students can get in touch with each other through the online social areas at Innovate, which staff also contribute to. These areas are only public within the secure environment of the provision, not internet wide. The social areas at Innovate are also closely monitored and moderated by staff:

"Like the clubs and societies...it's all moderated. So...within the chat areas whenever a new discussion thread is started, before it all goes live, it comes to a couple of different members of staff...you can take it off straight away if it's going to be about a student or something like that" (Regional Manager).

The Chief Operations Manager further suggested that due to the unique features of the virtual environment, young people could also feel a sense of control, and therefore security:

"From a different perspective it's massively empowering to those students that...have got...self-confidence issues and things like that because you're in full control about what you tell me about your circumstances...that works really, really well for certain types of students" (Chief Operations Manager).

4.2.2.1.5.1 Staff

For staff, features of the online provision allow them to control the environment to ensure it remains safe and secure for all young people; *"we're able to control the online environment to*

suit special circumstances of the individuals” (Chief Operations Manager). Within virtual classrooms, teachers can create small groups or individual access. They can restrict access to some communication features such as microphones and the public text chat if necessary, keeping the private text chat open to ensure students are still able to speak to the teacher.

“The classroom, the teachers have so much control. If they were using bad language on the chat...the microphones are normally muted, so the teacher can engage the class...the minute the teachers would see something going on, they would disable the public chat and then that would mean the students can only private chat the teachers...they can’t chat to each other. And obviously we can...delete the chat as well” (Regional Manager).

Teachers suggested that these features were only used occasionally to support the management of behavioural issues and to minimise any disruption to the lesson and other learners, but that they could be very effective. *“We have abilities to put them into little groups within the classroom...we can take that student out and say ‘right, now you really have no audience whatsoever, so you can either get on with the work or you can sit there and be bored, which is it going to be?’”* (Helen). *“The technology allows us to react very quickly to situations which may otherwise escalate and cause problems”* (Harry).

“Just a click, literally we can turn everything off. And they can still hear me speaking, so effectively...the kids who are still wanting to take part in the lesson and learn, they can still hear my voice...and I can still speak to them on a private basis...whereas in a mainstream classroom, if somebody kicks off...until that person calms down, or has been escorted out...learning just stops, and all the other learners feel the tension of that. It probably throws the teacher...too, so we’re ...very fortunate...to have that way of managing that” (Harry).

4.2.2.1.6 Access to social opportunities

Participants valued access to manageable social opportunities that Innovate could provide for young people. In relation to research question one, one of the young people suggested that they had gained friends through the provision. Social times could be very limited for young people not attending school, and due to the impact of their illness; *“she’s got two friends who she sees about once every three months or something, you know it’s not enough”* (Mrs A). Innovate provides a peer group for lessons; *“you know before they just had the tutor, it was just them and the tutor, whereas now, when they’re online they’ve got the social aspect as well”* (Mrs B), *“it gives her social contact with other children her age...I know that’s not about education but it’s massively important”* (Mrs A). Both parents were pleased that their child had

access to increased social opportunities, but also that the use of the social areas at Innovate were optional which enabled their child to manage the impact of their illness better.

“Sometimes they find that quite tiring to do as well. So, I just sort of leave it up to them, if they go on it, they go on it, if they don’t, they don’t. Which is nice as well, there’s no expectations” (Mrs B).

Jane also suggested that for two of her students with social communication difficulties and mental health issues, Innovate gave them access to manageable social contact with peers, where they had an element of control around their interactions.

“Both of those two boys...have social communication difficulties. They are involved, I know they don’t necessarily contribute, but they are there, and they are listening, and they do hear other kids whereas when they were in school, they were quite isolated” (Jane).

For another student, Jane suggested that meeting other young people through the provision reduced feelings of isolation and provided peer support; *“Emma, the young lady who’s just had ME...was quite delighted to find she wasn’t the only child in the world who was having these horrendous issues”* (Jane).

4.2.2.1.7 Dependability

Young people indicated that Innovate is a provision that they can depend on. They suggested that one of the differences the provision had made to their learning was that it afforded them a continuity of learning which they hadn’t necessarily experienced previously in relation to their education. They suggested that Innovate’s combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning meant that they always had access to their learning when they needed it. *“Having Innovate, it means that I’ve always got that kind of access to an education of some sort. So it’s a constant route, rather than a little bit here and a little bit there”* (Brian).

“It’s been consistent and more available and that’s the main thing really. Whereas the rest of my education hasn’t been consistent or available. Even if I’m ill at Innovate, I’m still able to go to their lesson, and just not speak and just watch, and if I’m not even able to watch, I can go on the recordings later” (Abigail).

Young people also suggested that they could depend on both staff and resources to support their learning. Online access to learning materials meant that they were available to young people whenever they needed them, not just during live lessons. *“If you ever feel like you’ve missed something, or you haven’t got any of the information, it’s all there in the class site...it’s*

all there for you to access it when you need it, whenever you need it” (Brian). Brian valued the availability of staff to provide 1:1 sessions to support his learning when he needed it.

“If ever you aren’t too sure on something in a lesson and you feel you need a bit more of an edge up on it, then all you have to do is say the word 1:1 and they’ll give you an extra lesson on that, that’s been particularly helpful for me” (Brian).

4.2.2.1.8 Use of ICT

Both parents mentioned different benefits of the use of ICT to support their child’s learning. Parent B suggested that the use of technology built on her children’s existing interest in ICT and had increased their enjoyment of their learning. *“I think they find it more fun...they like using the computer, so I suppose it’s more fun, you know a more fun way of learning” (Parent B). “It’s just opened up a whole new world for them, because at the end of the day...it’s all technology these days, isn’t it, with kids” (Parent B). Parent A suggested that the use of ICT mediated some of the effects of her child’s medical illness, by reducing the amount of information her child needed to process when learning online, compared to a conventional classroom.*

“If they’ve got ME and they’re really tired, they can’t take in a lot of information at the same time...so if she was sat in a classroom, there would be a lot of visual information, a lot of audio...then the teacher, there’s lots of different things for your brain to take in...whereas if she’s online, she can just be in a quiet space, and literally just concentrate on what the teacher’s saying, you know there’s not all that extra information to take in” (Parent A).

4.2.2.2 Barriers

Seven main themes emerged relating to perceived barriers; ICT issues, limits to online environment, communication issues, limit to subject choice, funding, staff not being ‘clued up’, and lack of student motivation (as illustrated in figure 5).

4.2.2.2.1 ICT Issues

This section considers issues with ICT which can impact on the effectiveness of the learning provision. It incorporates; connectivity and compatibility, and functionality.

4.2.2.2.1.1 Connectivity and compatibility

When asked about any factors which inhibit the effectiveness of Innovate, participants suggested that *“the technology, functionality, connectivity” (Callum)* could hinder learning and teaching at times. Participants indicated that issues with connectivity could impact on the

young person's ability to access to the provision or to use it successfully; *"Internet problems!"* (Parent B).

"Sometimes you do find that the internet is a problem...but only in the respect that they may not be able to attend the live lesson, or they may not be able to fully understand what the teacher is saying which then is a big problem" (Harry).

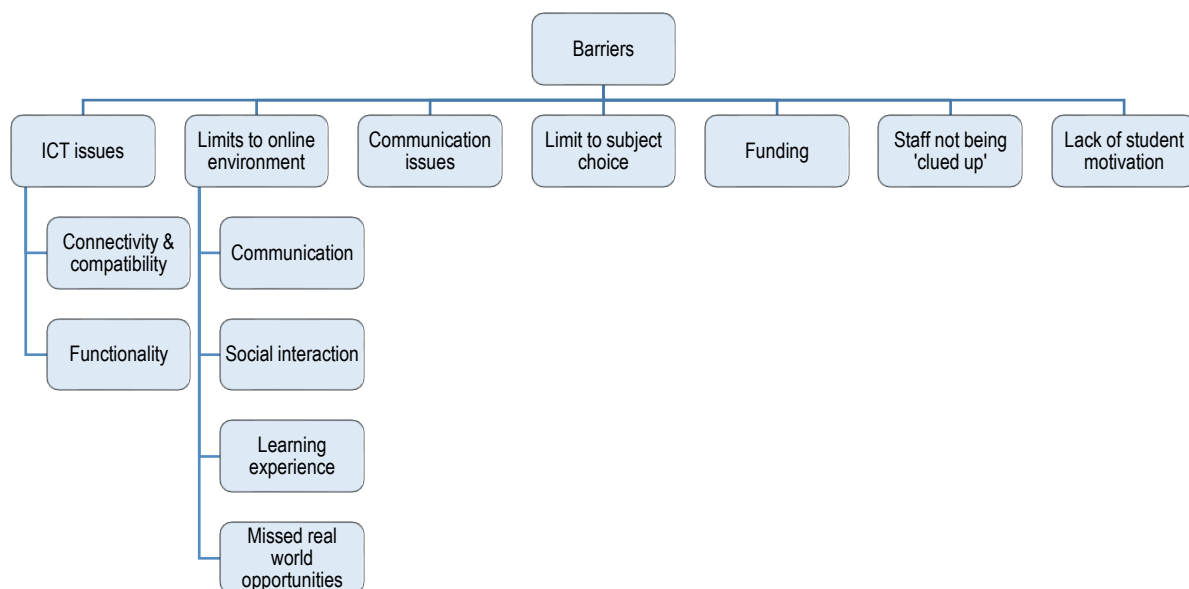


Figure 5: Thematic network of perceived barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate

When asked if they were always able to log on when they needed to young people said: *"other than a couple of times, yeah"* (Brian). David suggested issues were perhaps more frequent: *"Yeah, sometimes. It's just every month maybe, you're not able to get in"* (David). Issues with access to the provision seemed to be more prevalent when streaming live lessons using mobile internet, or using school provided computers or laptops. *"Internet connection seems to be a biggie of late. Not all students have access to certain things. Some of them are on mobile internet, which when you get into the classroom, it just doesn't work"* (Helen). *"Sometimes they have school provided laptops which are on complete lock-down"* (Helen).

Other issues appeared to relate to the provision's compatibility with the operating system being used by the young person; *"it's been fine up until a couple of days ago when none of the Macs would work"* (Abigail). *"We have Apple Macs and it's not always compatible with what they're doing"* (Parent A).

The impact of connectivity and compatibility issues could be challenging for young people. *"He got very frustrated at first, because he found it very difficult, the connectivity test and things didn't go great"* (Jane). *"We brought him into school...in the end, to get it all set up...but then"*

he had trouble because all our firewalls were too strong in school to let it come through (Jane). Abigail commented on the significance of learning being completely online and compared the use of technology at Innovate to being in a physical classroom: *"[At school] if the technology is down, you're still having your lesson and you're still learning. Whereas if it goes wrong at Innovate, there's no lesson at all"* (Abigail).

However, participants also suggested that *"the tech support is very good"* (Parent A) and any technical issues were usually resolved quickly. *"If I can't get into the lessons my Mum rings up Innovate and they fix it for me... [I sometimes] have to wait a little bit but most of the time it's fixed quickly"* (Cameron). Teachers noted that access to recorded lessons could alleviate short term issues with streaming live content as students could download these at any point and then watch them without the need for an internet connection.

4.2.2.2.1.2 Functionality

Along with connectivity, the teachers and one of the young people also suggested that the functionality of the ICT could affect teaching and learning on occasion, including difficulty accessing software, websites, and other features of the provision.

"There have been a couple nicks and bumps here and there...one of the main ones is a problem with the assignment section, which I know a few of my classmates have experienced as well. It'll just not allow you to send assignments in or access them" (David).

This issue seemed more prevalent for young people using computers which were personally owned or owned by the school or setting, as these may not always have the appropriate software installed to access all features of the provision, or their firewall security prevented the use of features of the provision. *"The home students seem to be okay, ones that are logging on from school or inclusion centres if their computers are on lock-down, that can provide a lot of issues for us...it can sometimes bring the lessons down a little bit"* (Helen).

"The software that sometimes is lacking for kids. Something as basic as Office for instance, which is a real shame because if they don't have that they can't open up work and homework assignments and things...we do state to be fair, that they do need these things but for whatever reason, sometimes...it slips through the net. But that's not very frequent I guess" (Harry).

Helen suggested that access to the provision wasn't particularly equitable for students experiencing these issues, but that staff worked well together and tried to alleviate these difficulties as much as possible by adapting their lesson and having an alternative plan.

“Fortunately, we become aware of things as the year goes on and we are quite good at noting things down, so all the other teachers are aware as well. So you know you’ll have a class where you don’t even attempt videos and then you’ll know when you’ve got a class where it’s okay, they can all get on it, we can do this activity. I mean it’s not particularly fair for the students, but you have to work with what you’re given” (Helen).

“So it does present some challenges, but fortunately we’ve always got a backup plan” (Helen).

“It’s all stuff we’ve learnt to work around” (Helen).

When asked about how he would like to see Innovate develop in future, Arthur suggested improvements with aspects of the technology. He noted that on occasion access to common features of a lesson could be cumbersome; *“I think the technology could be a lot better. It’s quite hard to show videos...you’ve got to do a lot of different steps...it would be a lot easier if we could just, ‘there’s the video, watch it’”* (Arthur).

4.2.2.2.2 Limits to online environment

This section considers the limits to the online environment which inhibit the effectiveness of the provision. It incorporates; communication, social interaction, learning experience and missed real world opportunities.

4.2.2.2.2.1 Communication

When asked about what a conventional school could offer that Innovate was unable to, teachers proposed *“a physical environment”* (Callum). Participants suggested that the online learning environment posed some limits around interpersonal communication due to the lack of face-to-face interaction as well as verbal and non-verbal communication.

“There are some barriers and I think when you first start that’s really daunting.

You...think ‘I don’t know what this child looks like’, lots of the time we don’t know what they sound like because they don’t want their microphones turned on” (Helen).

“Sometimes you might not know who you’re talking to...is that a TA [teaching assistant] who you’re talking to, or is that the child...?” (Arthur). Callum suggested the advantages of a physical environment for the teacher was *“understanding a student’s body language. If a student does not respond in the text or by voice, I really have little idea what is going on, on their side”* (Callum). Abigail suggested that online communication via text was lacking in verbal and aural cues, and that this could cause ambiguity or misunderstanding about what was being communicated:

"I suppose when somebody says something in the classroom, you can understand their tone of voice and you know whether they are saying it jokingly or whether they're saying it seriously and when it's in a text you can't tell...because you're online, you're not really sure of how things are being put across...you know, you don't get the inflection" (Abigail).

4.2.2.2.2 Social interaction

Learning online rather than in a conventional school also had an impact on young people's opportunities to socialise face-to-face with peers and to develop relationships. Both young people and parents commented on the lack of face-to-face contact and social interaction with others whilst learning online. *"It would be social interaction as well...I mean you miss out on that when you're at Innovate" (Abigail). "Getting on with somebody online in a social way, I suppose it isn't as good is it?" (Brian). "Well, she'd actually see people (laughs)" (Parent A). "You've got the face-to-face contact, but I would say that's about it really" (Parent B).*

Young people suggested that developing friendships with online peers was difficult due to the virtual nature of Innovate, interactions being limited to a lesson environment, and the lack of a physical meeting place. *"Well at Innovate, because it's across the internet, you can't actually visit them or anything" (David).*

"As far as classmates go, I mean I guess it's quite a bit more difficult...I guess it's just the fact that you don't really know them, I mean if you were to have one of your friends...you'd know them and you'd have proper conversations with them outside of lessons...but with Innovate most of you do is going to be in the lessons, so you're not really talking with classmates there as such" (Brian).

Whilst acknowledging the lack of face-to-face contact with peers within the online environment, parents also indicated that due to their child's illness, social times with others; particularly those which involved leaving home, could impact on their energy and wellness. *"They don't have face-to-face contact with Innovate, but having face-to-face contact is more draining on them anyway" (Parent B). "She's not well enough so...I do think that if it was possible, she would be better off in a school or college...if she was well enough" (Parent A).*

4.2.2.2.3 Learning experience

Teachers suggested that the online environment posed some limits to the parameters of active and practical learning experiences for young people, which could be seen as a barrier to the effectiveness of the provision.

“Although the experiments are good, they’re not as good as doing the real thing. Because even though we did choose the cress experiment, maybe the other ones if they had done, like the experiments there, they’d had experience of the lab, might have been a bit easier for them” (Arthur).

“Anything that’s practical. I’d say that’s one of the only major drawbacks...I’m a big fan of hands on, because I do believe that a lot of learners; I’m actually one of them, I learn best when I actually do things...in my experience a lot of people are like that. And that’s something we can’t offer, but it’s not like the end of the world sort of thing” (Harry).

“Maybe the different types of learning, I mean we offer a good alternative, but we can’t offer as many, in one space perhaps...you’ve got teaching assistants in a classroom, you’ve got the fact that they can get up and move around. You could have them doing all kinds of different things as an activity...with us, we can do that to an extent” (Helen).

4.2.2.2.4 Missed real world opportunities

When asked about anything school could offer that Innovate can’t, Jane suggested that by learning online and away from school *“they get cut off a little bit don’t they?”* (Jane). She elaborated that learning online and away from school, students could sometimes miss out on aspects of school life, such as peer relationships and school social events, as well as the daily routine and life skills practice involved in getting themselves to school independently. *“There just not there being with friends and things”* (Jane). *“And all the other things that go with it, like different assemblies and all the reward trips and everything that happens, they miss out on...sometimes they do still come, but it depends how they’re feeling”* (Jane). *“And even the two boys that have got the communication difficulties, if you’re not careful the independence goes a little bit ‘cause they’re just staying at home, not travelling, not going anywhere”* (Jane). *“At least coming to school, the routine of coming to school...they know they have to leave, and they have to come in”* (Jane).

4.2.2.2.4 Communication issues

Participants suggested that both delayed communication and a lack of shared information could inhibit the effectiveness of the provision at times. Delayed communication within the set-up process for Innovate appeared to impact both parental satisfaction regarding the process and the young person’s learning experience. This included delayed communication from the funding body responsible for paying for the provision for the young people and from Innovate itself, regarding subject choices and necessary exam centre arrangements. *“We’re*

still waiting for the acknowledgement of them saying 'yes, we'll carry on funding for the extra two years', so it's just a nightmare, absolute nightmare" (Parent B).

"I think if we'd known, if they'd [Innovate] contacted us a bit earlier, she might have been able to choose another subject instead of Geography...we didn't actually find out there was no Geography until September and then it was too late...the local authority would have paid for an extra subject, but it wasn't optional then" (Parent A).

Jane indicated that there had been some difficulty during their initial involvement with the provision around the details of controlled assessment for the student they had enrolled at the time, which resulted in some time pressures for both the school and the student. Jane postulated that the situation may have affected the student's grade. However, having been through the situation, Jane and her setting were now confident about requirements for controlled assessment and were keen to have this set up in advance in future.

"The only time we had any difficulty, probably because it was the first time through and probably because we didn't think about it. We run AQA Science and Innovate run Ed Excel... we weren't sharp enough to realise she was going to have to do a controlled assessment. Obviously couldn't do a controlled assessment online...we didn't set it up soon enough for her. And then we didn't have staff who'd got the expertise for Ed Excel...it was just a little bit chaotic" (Jane).

"So that wasn't great, but it was partly a misunderstanding on our behalf as well...to not really realise what was required at that point" (Jane).

"And she did get a D in the end and I felt, like if we'd got the controlled assessment sorted out better and the school support available for her, with someone who knew exactly what was required, I think she would have got her C" (Jane).

Teachers suggested that the customer didn't always appear to understand how the provision worked and this could lead to some confusion and delay with the set-up process. When asked about any factors which inhibit the effectiveness of the provision, Helen said *"how much they [the customer] understand how we work, can sometimes be confusing" (Helen).*

"Sometimes I don't think the customers understand what it is that we do, or how it works. The students seem to grasp it fairly easily, but in terms of getting them on board, getting them signed up, getting through the induction, that can sometimes be a massive chore for the sake of half an hour of just showing them how the system works" (Helen).

Innovate staff also suggested that a lack of shared information could inhibit the effectiveness of the provision on occasion but was usually resolved quickly. This was in relation to the customer (for example, the school, setting or local authority) sharing information about a young person's needs as well as their more general understanding about the provision and how it works. When a young person enrolls with Innovate, the customer is asked to share information about the young person's situation, to enable Innovate to best provide learning tailored to their needs. Staff suggested that the amount of helpful information shared could vary.

"We get as much as the customer tells us, which in some cases is lots. Sometimes it's really extensive and it's really useful...other times it's not enough and we find stuff. Like we'll do things in the classroom and it's like 'oh so-and-so has this issue' and it's like 'right okay, why didn't we know that in the first place'...our on boarding team tries to get as much as they possibly can, but sometimes it's just down to the customer, if they don't want to share it, or maybe they don't feel it's important, I don't know, then sometimes it's a bit tricky" (Helen).

"in some other areas we're just treated like...'you can deal with that student, we're not interested'...so we get no input around their circumstances other than a registration form and we just do the best we can with them" (Chief Operations Manager).

4.2.2.2.3 Limit to subject choice

Abigail said she would have liked to study an additional subject with Innovate, but that the provision hadn't been able to offer it at the time: *"Originally I think I said I'd like to do English Language, English Literature and Geography. But they don't do a Geography course anymore...yeah, no-one's doing Geography at Innovate I don't think"* (Abigail).

In congruence with her daughter Abigail, Parent A also suggested that it had been disappointing that Abigail hadn't been able to do all the subjects she would have liked to do, due to low numbers of students wanting to take the course. *"She really wanted to do Geography and they weren't running it because there weren't enough people who wanted to do it...so yeah, it's just a shame"* (Parent A).

When asked about how she would like to see the provision develop in the future, Helen said:

"I would love to see...more subjects being offered, I think. Because at the minute we do...the basic curriculum, lot of Maths, English, Science. But A-levels would be nice, we've got some, but just to have the subjects that students would choose, rather than the one they maybe need, if you know what I mean" (Helen).

4.2.2.2.5 Funding

The availability of funding was a potential barrier for access to the provision for the parents and customer. Parent A felt fortunate that her child had been successful in obtaining funding from the local authority but was aware that not all schools or local authorities offered this. *“I know there are children who would like to be on there, from the support sites I go on of mothers with kids with ME, and they can’t get the funding...we were very lucky, but I know it’s a barrier for a lot of other people”* (Parent A). Parent B said that they needed to apply for funding every year and the process had not been easy. *“We had to really, really push for them to get funding. And it’s the same every year, we have this trouble”* (Parent B).

Jane had indicated that her setting planned to expand their use of Innovate as an alternative provision. However, whilst the costings seemed reasonable, the school had limited resources to fund the provision. This included the number of students they were able to enrol as well as the breadth of subjects that each student could enrol for. *“The only thing again that’s stopping us is the money. Because it’s £500 a term or whatever it is, which £1500 for a GCSE is relatively cheap, but we just haven’t got the money to support”* (Jane). *“And the cost, I mean we could use this with loads more children, but we just haven’t got the funding to be able to afford to use it”* (Jane). *“They can’t offer the breadth that we can. Maybe they can but we can’t afford to buy the breadth that some of these children need”* (Jane).

4.2.2.2.6 Staff not being ‘clued up’

Young people and parents indicated that staff not being ‘clued-up’ could inhibit the effectiveness of their learning at times. Abigail and her parent suggested that a lack of teacher familiarity with the VLP had impacted on the fluidity of the lesson and therefore her experience of it:

“The teachers really have to know what they’re doing...there’s one teacher and he’s not as experienced and it’s taken him a while to get into the swing of noticing what the kids are typing on his stream...he has to be reading what they’re saying while he’s talking and I think that’s tricky, for him” (Parent A).

However, Abigail suggested that this had improved as her teacher became more familiar with the technology:

“I’ve got two different teachers...one teacher is very familiar with the technology and the lessons are brilliant and the other teacher is new and not so familiar with the technology...the first couple of weeks it was hard to really understand what he was

saying...but it didn't take him that long to get properly used to it, it's all okay now"
(Abigail).

Brian also suggested that a lack of consistent information from the staff team had impacted on his learning experience and led to some confusion:

"The only thing that's been a bit of a problem lately is with exams, I think that's more with how informed the teachers are...it seems every person I ask about them, I get a different answer...so you don't really know what perspective to look at it from" (Brian).

Parent A also suggested that the teacher's depth of understanding of the child's illness or reason for attending Innovate could impact on the learning experience and well-being of the young person. *"Abigail is there because she has got ME...and it's a very complicated condition, and I don't think they always quite understand. But that's not a criticism at all, because they are very good"* (Parent A).

"She's never been personally upset, but I know she's thought somebody else might have been at one point...and it would be good for them to discuss the reasons why the kids are there...just so they've got that knowledge and that extra bit of understanding, that would help them, and the kids" (Parent A).

4.2.2.2.7 Lack of student motivation

Both teachers and the customer suggested that a *"willingness to participate"* (Callum) could inhibit the effectiveness of Innovate. Jane suggested that a lack of motivation to engage with their learning online not only had consequences for the student, but also financially for her setting. *"I think the only barrier really is getting them logged on"* (Jane). *"If they don't choose to log on, there's nothing you can do"* (Jane). *"That's the only danger, of them not using it, and I know it's not a massive outlay, but it's a lot of money if they decide they're just not going to take part"* (Jane).

Teachers suggested that young people who may benefit from support to engage in lessons, could more easily choose to carry out another activity whilst logged in to Innovate.

"Sometimes you do get the kids that just disengage. They'll sign on to their lesson and walk off and go and play x-box. Because it's what they can do" (Arthur). *"Of course, gaming, and social media can present their own distractions for students online, so that it something virtual learning has to contend with too"* (Callum). The setting from which the young person is logging on might also contain distractions outside the teacher's or student's control. *"Sometimes they're in a school and the lessons going on around them, or their friends might be doing something else, so you haven't got the concentration from them"* (Helen). Helen also suggested

that a physical classroom could enable additional strategies to support student engagement that Innovate could not. *“It can be quite hard to get the students initially engaged compared to in a classroom, because obviously you can use, like you’re wandering around, you can get them to get up and move around if you’re in a classroom, you don’t have that facility here”* (Helen).

4.3 Innovate inspection report

The Innovate inspection report was analysed using content analysis as described in section 3.6.3.1. Coding of the report was informed by the study propositions resulting from the literature review and the categories which emerged were reflective of some of the themes identified above. The categories and most frequently recorded codes are described in the findings below.

In relation to research question 1 regarding how effective Innovate is in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school, the categories identified included ‘positive outcomes for young people’ the ‘curriculum enables progression routes’. The report suggested that Innovate’s overall effectiveness as a virtual learning provision was ‘good’. This included the effectiveness of leadership, quality of teaching, personal development, behaviour and welfare, outcomes for young people, and addressing additional support needs. Findings from the content analysis suggested several positive outcomes for young people including making good progress in their learning, developing their learning skills, experiencing an increase in confidence and a reduction in anxiety, which are congruent with the current research findings. In addition to current findings, they suggested that the curriculum provided by Innovate enabled positive progression routes for young people moving on to further training or employment opportunities.

In relation to research question 2 regarding the facilitators and barriers to the effectiveness of the provision, findings from the content analysis suggested several facilitators in line with current research findings. Categories and frequent codes identified included ‘safe and secure learning environment’, ‘personalised approach’, ‘quality of learning environment’, ‘staff development’, ‘flexibility’, ‘involving parents’ and ‘ethos’. The provision of a safe and secure learning environment incorporated the security of the virtual platform itself including the young people’s ability to communicate confidentially with their teachers, as well as effective safeguarding arrangements and robust policies and procedures that Innovate has in place to keep students safe. In adopting a personalised approach, tailoring learning to the young person’s, strengths, interests, and aspirations was key. Less frequently recorded codes also included small class sizes and flexibility within the curriculum. The quality of the learning environment incorporated; highly skilled and supportive staff, who provide helpful feedback to

young people which allows them to improve and progress, and the flexibility the provision could provide for young people; enabled by remote access, synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities, and shorter lessons. Staff development included training and management support for CPD. Keeping parents informed of their child's progress, and Innovate's ethos; including high expectations for staff and young people, also emerged as facilitators.

The findings also suggested some barriers and areas for improvement. 'Limits to improvement planning' was the most frequently recorded code, and impacted on staff understanding of areas for improvement, as well as a lack of information about student engagement with recorded lessons. The report suggested that improving attendance could ensure a continuity of learning for young people.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises and discusses the main findings in relation to each of the research questions. The extent to which Innovate is effective in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school is explored (RQ1), as are the perceived facilitators and barriers to the effectiveness of the provision as viewed by the young people, parents, and other key stakeholder participants (RQ2). The main findings relating to the basic themes and subthemes are summarised and considered in relation to pertinent literature, linking to the study propositions. Possible implications for theory, practice and future research are then explored, followed by discussion of the limitations of the present research. The final section considers the relevance of the current research in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organisation; WHO, 2020). It provides a brief introduction to online learning within the context of the pandemic and goes on to consider the relevance of the current findings in relation to this, as well as to educational psychology practice.

The current study aims to explore the effectiveness of an online provision; Innovate, in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school, and to seek the views of young people, parents and other key stakeholders regarding factors which facilitate or inhibit its success. Both UK and international legislation highlight the right of CYP to receive an education which meets their needs and supports their development, enabling them to achieve their fullest potential. Yet for some CYP, attending mainstream school full time is challenging and the factors relating to this are often highly individualised and complex. Persistent absence from school has been linked to a number of poor outcomes and as such, regular participation in learning is seen as key to reducing risks and improving outcomes for CYP. With a government focus on improving outcomes, there was a move towards personalised learning and developing a greater variety of AP which was tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of CYP. In England, a variety of APs exist to support CYP experiencing challenges which impact on their attendance at school, including a growing number of VLPs.

Whilst there is a growing international evidence base regarding virtual learning for school aged CYP in general, there is a paucity of research exploring the effectiveness of virtual learning as an alternative provision (Gutherson et al., 2011, Maor & Mitchem, 2015). It is suggested that VLPs can offer a more personalised and differentiated learning experience, where CYP have more control over their learning experience, are able to learn at a pace that suits them, and where they engage in more independent learning (Thomson, 2010). A small number of peer-reviewed case studies have provided valuable insights into specific VLPs for particular groups

of CYP who have been disconnected from education (Cook, 2005) or who are experiencing chronic illness (Maor & Mitchem, 2015; Wilkie, 2011; 2014, Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015; 2016). The latter studies were set within the Australian and Belgian contexts, and it is acknowledged there is little research exploring AP for CYP with physical or mental health issues in the UK (DfE, 2017b). In addition, the VLPs explored have been one component of a broader package of provision (Cook, 2005) or have been a newly established provision, delivered by the CYP's host school where CYP were taught by their class teachers (Maor & Mitchem, 2015; Wilkie, 2011; 2014, Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015; 2016). Similar to Tyldesley (2011), this study aims to explore the effectiveness of an established independent VLP within the UK context, in order to build on the limited evidence base regarding the effectiveness of VLPs to support CYP experiencing challenges affecting their learning and attendance at school.

5.2 Research Question 1: How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?

Innovate aims to support the learning of CYP with a variety of needs. In line with government findings regarding CYP in AP (DfE, 2018b), demographic data indicated that more than 60% of the CYP enrolled with Innovate were male and more than 60% were in Key Stage 4.

Quantitative findings did not suggest the provision was more effective for some young people than others. In general, findings suggest that CYP attending Innovate had around 40% attendance in live lessons. This does not take into account the percentage of CYP accessing recorded lessons as this data was not available. Findings also suggest that CYP attending live lessons behave positively and contribute to lessons well. Statistical analyses of the data available indicated no significant differences in:

- attendance between different categories of need (e.g. excluded, medically ill, school refusal);
- the relationship between attendance and behaviour; and,
- either behaviour or contribution across the categories of need.

Where attendance is concerned, only data relating to attendance at live lessons was available, so it was not possible to explore the use of recorded lessons within the quantitative analyses. In addition, missing data may have led to potential biases which needed to be considered. Missing data suggested that a third of CYP enrolled with Innovate never attended live lessons. According to Innovate's results data from 2011-12, 4.1% CYP did not start lessons after enrolling, 8.4% did not engage with the provision and 2.5% left the provision due to health issues, which may offer some further insight into non-attendance at live lessons. However, as

Innovate offers both synchronous and asynchronous learning, it is also possible that some enrolled CYP only ever access the recorded lessons; a facilitative factor identified within the qualitative findings and in previous research (Tyldesley, 2011), for example those using the provision for revision purposes or who are medically ill. As some CYP may not start lessons after enrolling or may struggle to engage, careful consideration and planning are key when considering AP placements for individual CYP, to ensure that they are matched with a provision that will meet their needs and enable them to achieve meaningful outcomes, as outlined in recent government guidance (DfE, 2018a).

The researcher had also hoped to include raw attainment data relating to baseline and summative assessment as well as coursework progress, within the qualitative analyses; however, this could not feasibly be provided and so it was not possible to consider this in relation to the effectiveness of the provision. An Innovate document giving an overview of their results from 2011-12 was shared by the Chief Operations Manager and suggested that out of 263 CYP who were put forward to sit exams, 20% achieved GCSEs at grades A to C and 71.63% at grades A to G. It was also noted that of those CYP who started with the provision in the first half term, 30.83% achieved GCSE grades A to C and 94.17% achieved grades A to G. For those who started after the first half term, 11.76% achieved GCSE grades A to C and 80.93% achieved grades A to G.

Considering CYP for whom the provision might be most effective, qualitative findings suggested the notion of a 'successful student' as one who already demonstrates a motivation to achieve; an alternative explanation to the current study's proposition identified in previous literature which suggests that online learning can help engage CYP in more self-directed and independent learning (Thomson, 2010). It is suggested that learner motivation (Widjaja & Chen, 2017) and participation (Hrastinski, 2009) are two of the most important factors that contribute to the effectiveness of online learning. Current findings also suggested that a 'successful student' might typically include CYP with medical illness, whom Gutherson et al. (2011) have previously identified as making the most significant gains from online learning. Ambition and perseverance with independent learning were factors identified by Wilkie (2014) as facilitating the effectiveness of VLP for CYP who were chronically ill and unable to attend school. One consideration may be that the VLP is most effective for CYP who remain motivated to learn and where the predominant challenge affecting attendance at school is around physical health, rather than attitudinal/systemic or school behaviour-related factors (see BPS, 2017). Alongside individual factors such as motivation, findings also suggested that a 'successful student' is one who receives appropriate support from others to meet their needs. Research has suggested that experiencing a supportive school climate and having a caring

parent/carer-child relationship; where the parent is involved in their child's education, can act as protective factors for CYP's success in their learning (Minnard, 2002).

In the current study, although no significant difference was found between either behaviour or contribution and CYP's categories of need, behaviour and contribution scores are only given during live lessons, so it may be that regardless of their needs, CYP logging into live lessons at Innovate demonstrate a motivation to engage with their learning.

All four young people who participated in the current study experienced medical illness which impacted on their attendance at school, learning and confidence. In line with previous literature (Maor & Mitchem, 2018; Zhu & Van Winkel, 2015; 2016), findings suggested that Innovate was effective in reducing their anxiety about being away from school and falling behind with their learning. This was aided by the ability to access the provision from home and to use the library of recorded lessons when it suited them, both of which meant that CYP were better able to manage their learning and their illness. Where CYP had experienced a dip in their self-confidence due to the impact of their illness or misperceptions about it, learning with Innovate had enabled them to feel more confident again. This was attributed to several factors including, Innovate's personalised approach; a factor successful in the effectiveness of other APs, (Gutherson et al., 2011), the degree of anonymity which the online environment afforded to the CYP, and the CYP experiencing progress and success in their learning; both in terms of positive feedback from staff and exam accreditation. In general, findings indicated that stakeholders valued Innovate as an AP to support CYP's learning and a 'lifeline' where other provision had not been viable.

5.3 Research Question 2: What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate?

Overall, there were a greater number of facilitative factors to the effectiveness of Innovate for CYP with medical illness, than there were barriers. Analogous to this study's proposition drawn from existing literature (Thomson, 2010; Tyldesley, 2011), Innovate can offer a flexible learning experience for CYP and enable a sense of control over their learning. Given the difficulties CYP with medical illness, including CFS can experience, such as physical and cognitive exhaustion, pain, issues with concentration and sensory sensitivities (Sheridan et al., 2013), flexibility and a sense of control are key in managing their health and their learning. By accessing their learning from the comfort of home and having a shorter lesson duration of thirty minutes, demands on CYP's physical strength, energy and mental agility are reduced, and in addition, the availability of both live and recorded lessons means that CYP are better able to manage the impact of their illness day to day.

Home access can also alleviate potential social pressures around needing to look and feel well enough in front of peers and adults at school. Where previous research has explored the use of video to improve social interactions through VLPs, results have not always been positive with CYP not wishing to be seen via video (Ellis et al., 2013; Lui, Inkpen & Pratt, 2015). Affording anonymity to CYP using an avatar and their first name only and providing features which enable a sense of control over their learning environment, such as the private chat facility and feedback button, were viewed as facilitative factors to Innovate's effectiveness and helped to create a 'safe domain' for CYP to learn. This is congruent with the current study's proposition that online learning provides a secure environment for CYP, where previous research has suggested that providing a safe environment can reduce potential barriers relating to social and emotional stressors and enable a fresh start; including developing new relationships (Cook, 2005; Tyldesley, 2011). Although findings in the current study were congruent with literature suggesting that online learning can limit face-to-face social opportunities (Tyldesley, 2011), they also suggested that Innovate can reduce feelings of isolation and provide the opportunity for more manageable social contact for CYP who are chronically ill.

Innovate's organisational ethos was a further facilitative factor to the effectiveness of the provision. Personalised learning, i.e., tailoring learning to meet CYP's individual needs and circumstances, has been a facilitative theme within much of the existing literature exploring APs (DfE, 2012; Kendall, 2003; Thomson, 2010; Tyldesley, 2011) and appeared central to Innovate as an organisation. From enrolment, CYP's abilities, needs and circumstances are taken into account as much as possible in developing and organising their timetable and adapting learning where necessary. The sharing of relevant information is central to this; a key factor also identified in previous research (DfE, 2018b). Findings suggested that a lack of referral information could inhibit the effectiveness of the provision, as staff were not always aware of factors which may impact on the CYP's learning experience.

Tailoring learning to the young person was also made possible by an emphasis on staff building positive relationships with CYP, which previous research has also highlighted (Gutherson et al., 2011; Kendall, 2003). By exhibiting qualities such as demonstrating a genuine interest in, and understanding of their students, being approachable, accommodating, encouraging and responsive to communication and need, CYP felt understood, accepted, valued and able to grow in confidence. Congruent with previous research (DfE, 2018b), features of the provision such as small class sizes and 1:1 support were also valued as part of Innovate's personalised approach and enabled teachers to be more accessible to students.

Findings suggested that Innovate as an organisation holds high expectations for both students and staff, modelled by their Chief Executive. Staff work together as part of a team and are

expected to both undertake and take ownership of, regular CPD activities to continue to develop their knowledge and skills. As previous literature has highlighted (Duckworth, 2005; Tyldesley, 2011; Wilkie, 2014), a lack of staff training, or familiarity with the necessary ICT as current findings suggest, can impact on the learning experience, and inhibit the effectiveness of VLP. Staff competency and regular training are key; a view shared by Innovate staff.

Issues with ICT and connectivity are well documented in the literature regarding VLPs (Maor & Mitchem, 2015; St Leger & Campbell, 2008; Tyldesley, 2011) and were acknowledged in the current study's propositions, and findings, alongside limits to the functionality of the technology. Whilst these can be challenging for both students and teachers, and at times can result in a less than equitable learning experience for some CYP; findings also suggested that teachers worked around this where possible and that ICT support was readily provided when needed. Innovate appears to be an organisation which strives to improve and progress. In line with Maor and Mitchem (2015), further investigation and development of technologies may go some way to reducing ICT issues which impact on learning and teaching within VLPs.

5.4 Overview of current findings in relation to study propositions

The current study's propositions derived from the literature search, guided the researcher in their exploration of Innovate and have been considered in light of current findings described above. An overview of the propositions linking to both previous and current research can be found in table 5.1 below, including potential rival explanations.

Table 5.1: Overview of study propositions linking previous and current research

Study propositions	Links to previous literature	Links to current research
1. Learning online provides a secure environment in which to learn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a secure environment in which to learn (Cook, 2005; Tyldesley, 2011). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovate provides a secure online learning environment and 'safe domain' for CYP. • Innovate affords a degree of anonymity for young people.
2. Learning online enables a more personalised and flexible learning experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people can access a more individualised and differentiated learning experience (Thomson, 2010). • Curriculum tailored to the skills and interests of students (Cook, 2005). • Learning can be adapted to suit young person's needs (Tyldesley, 2011). • Young people can work at a pace consistent with their rate of learning (Thomson, 2010). • Access to library of recorded lessons at any time (Tyldesley, 2011). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailoring learning to young people and their individual circumstances enables a more personalised learning experience. • The online environment enables accessibility to, and responsivity from, teachers, which contributes to a more personalised experience. • Small class sizes contribute to a more personalised and flexible learning experience. • Remote access to learning enables flexibility. • Access to asynchronous

		<p>learning at any time enables flexibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorter lesson times enable young people to better manage needs. • A relaxed and less formal learning environment can reduce potential barriers and enable a more personalised experience.
3. Learning online enables young people to have more control over their learning experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have more control over their learning experience (Thomson, 2010). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote access enables CYP greater control of their learning experience, e.g. they can join from the comfort of home. • Young people can use features of the provision to choose how they communicate/share information and who they choose to do this with. • Innovate staff use features of the provision to ensure a supportive and effective learning environment.
4. Learning online can help to develop personal learning skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have more time to reflect (Thomson, 2010). • Young people engage more in self-directed and independent learning (Thomson, 2010). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people develop transferable learning skills. • Rival explanation: 'successful students' are those who already demonstrate motivation to learn online.
5. ICT and connectivity issues can inhibit the effectiveness of learning online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT /connectivity issues as barrier to learning online (St Leger & Campbell, 2008; Tyldesley, 2011). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with connectivity, compatibility and functionality of ICT can inhibit the effectiveness of the provision on occasion.
6. Learning online can limit social opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited interaction with peers (Tyldesley, 2011). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning online can limit social and 'real world' opportunities. • Rival explanation: Innovate can facilitate opportunities for CYP compared to home tuition and provides more manageable opportunities for those with medical illness.
7. Lack of training for staff can act as a barrier to learning online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student/teachers need to be competent with ICT (Duckworth, 2005). • More training needed for school staff (Tyldesley, 2011). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of familiarity with ICT can inhibit effectiveness of learning on occasion. • Lack of consistency of information being shared by staff can inhibit the learning experience on occasion.

5.5 Theoretical implications of the findings

Considering the findings in relation to relevant theory can support understanding of the effectiveness of Innovate as an AP for young people experiencing challenges to attending school due to ill health. As research has highlighted, several factors enable CYP to be successful in AP and with Innovate specifically, including flexible learning and teaching; learning tailored to need; caring, responsive, and knowledgeable staff; secure learning environment; and experiencing success. Whilst CYP in AP can have a wide range of individual needs, it may be argued that these factors involve meeting certain fundamental psychological needs through the learning environment and experience.

Several theories have explored basic psychological needs which are key to developmental growth, motivation and wellbeing including; Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943, 1954), Pringle's theory of the needs of children (1975, 1980, 1986) and Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) (1985, 2002). Where basic needs were previously considered to be hierarchical (Maslow, 1943), more recent theory postulates that they are inter-related and inter-dependent (Pringle, 1986), and indeed "the environment is of over-riding importance" (Pringle, 1986, p. 15). The importance of the environment for CYP's development is also emphasised through Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological framework, which suggests that CYP are at the centre of, and interact with a number of systems which influence their development, the microsystem; e.g. relationships with parents, peers and teachers, the mesosystem; e.g. whole school processes, practices, pedagogy (Libbey, 2004), the exosystem; e.g. the extended school community, and the macrosystem; e.g. legislation, public policies and government initiatives (Allen, Vella-Brodrick & Waters, 2016).

Giving consideration to the basic psychological needs identified within the above theories, it is suggested that Innovate helps to meet these, enabling CYP to have a sense of: safety and security (Maslow, 1943, 1954; Pringle, 1986); belongingness and connection (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Maslow, 1943, 1954; Pringle, 1986); autonomy and control (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Pringle, 1986); and competence and self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Maslow, 1943, 1954; Pringle, 1986), as outlined in Figure 6.

Innovate enables a sense of safety and security within the learning environment by: affording CYP a degree of anonymity; the ability to overcome potential barriers relating to social and emotional stressors which they may experience at school, reducing their anxiety; affording them a continuity of learning which they can depend on; and providing a sense of routine. A sense of belongingness and connection is facilitated by: having positive relationships with staff, feeling understood and accepted; staff valuing the young person, being approachable and

responsive and creating a “whole class...climate of involvement” (Pringle, 1986, p. 33); CYP having increased and manageable opportunities to interact with peers both in lessons and in the moderated online social areas available, reducing feelings of isolation; and having the opportunity to be part of the wider community at Innovate (house teams, online clubs and societies).

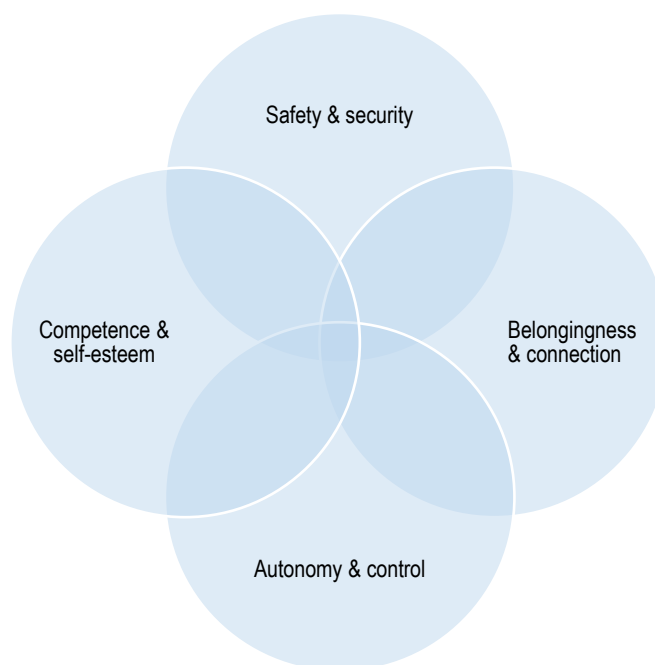


Figure 6: Psychological needs which can be met through the learning environment at Innovate

Having autonomy and a sense of control is facilitated by: having some choice around where (e.g. home, or other setting) and when to access lessons; how to communicate and who they wish to communicate with; teachers tailoring learning to needs and interests; teacher valuing methods of teaching which empower the learner and encourage responsibility for their own learning; and positive encouragement from adults. Innovate enables a sense of competency and self-esteem by: recognition of progress, achievements and developing skills; staff providing timely and informative feedback and providing 1:1 support when necessary to aid progress.

From a socio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), meeting these needs through the provision occurs within a broader context of social relationships, Innovate’s pedagogy, practices, ethos, and values as well as wider legislation and policy. It is interesting to consider whether there are factors which are unique to Innovate as an online provision in meeting these basic psychological needs, or how far a traditional secondary school learning environment might also accommodate for these.

In relation to safety and security, CYP have a right to be safe, including protection from discrimination (article 2, UNCRC), or from being hurt or treated badly (article 19, UNCRC) (UN, 1989). All schools have a duty to promote the welfare of their pupils and “to provide a safe environment in which children can learn” (DfE, 2019c, p. 5). Schools should foster a sense of safety and security through both the physical and relational environment; indeed, guidance suggests that they provide “a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults” (DfE, 2018c, p. 13). Positive teacher-pupil relationships characterised by mutual respect, support, and care (Cemalcilar, 2010), enable CYP to feel safe at school (Crosnoe, Johnson & Elder, 2004) and are associated with positive attitudes towards learning and increased self-esteem (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hughes and Kwok, 2007). They have also been identified as an important factor in enhancing academic outcomes for CYP (Hattie, 2009). Given that needs are inter-related, feeling safe at school has been identified as a key factor in a CYP’s sense of belonging (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Whitlock, 2006). As with Innovate, schools can also provide CYP with a routine, which can contribute to feelings of safety by providing familiarity, predictability, and consistency as well as structure to their day.

CYP’s rights to an education which meets their needs and enables them to achieve their fullest potential are enshrined in both national and international legislation (United Nations General Assembly, 1989; UNESCO, 1994; Education Act 1996; The Children and Families Act, 2014). Article 29 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) states that CYP have the right to an education which tries to develop their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential and respects their cultural identity, language, and values. National curriculum guidance (DfE, 2014) states that schools must offer a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the “spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils” (DfE, 2014, p. 4) and prepares them for future opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences. It also states that teachers should set high expectations and ambitious targets for every pupil, with lesson planning taking into account individual needs and removing potential barriers to CYP’s achievement. Reeve (2009) identified teaching practices which can empower CYP and support their sense of autonomy including; nurturing their skills, interests and preferences, adopting their perspective, providing explanatory rationales, providing choices, using non-controlling and informational language, and allowing time for self-paced learning. Further to these, Nicholson and Putwain (2018) also identified mutual respect between teachers and pupils, and flexibility within lessons, including lessons being more relaxed and informal, as supportive of CYP’s sense of autonomy. Teachers should encourage CYP to recognise and reflect on the progress they have made (DfE, 2011) and within the context of positive relationships, can

foster a sense of competency by providing “informational feedback focused on evidence of improvement and mastery and...progress-enabling hints when students seem stuck” (Hsu, Wang & Levesque-Bristol, 2019, p. 2161). Clarity in teaching and expectations, and teachers demonstrating confidence in young people have also been identified as supportive of CYP’s sense of competence (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018).

The factors discussed above are not unique to the online learning environment and should inform good practice in schools and AP, including online provision. Where Innovate may be able to better meet the needs of CYP, particularly those who are medically ill, is in enabling a sense of control over their learning and the reduction of potential barriers which can contribute to CYP’s sense of safety and security. Providing choice and flexibility regarding when and where CYP access their learning, allowing them to manage the impact of their illness, is difficult in a typical secondary school setting where lesson times and locations are largely determined by school, are taught in real time (synchronous), and opportunities for CYP to repeat the lesson are limited.

Innovate also affords a degree of anonymity, reduces some of the social and emotional pressures that CYP can experience and enables choice and flexibility regarding the methods and extent to which they can communicate with others. This would be very difficult to manage in a face-to-face setting such as a typical secondary school, where inherently, CYP are known and identifiable within the school community, “interaction is typically public” (Murphy & Rodrigues Manzanares, 2008, p. 1068), and where the parameters around interactions with others would be difficult to manage to the same extent afforded by the online environment. Enabling CYP who are ill to manage these pressures can better meet their needs and are better facilitated by the online learning environment.

It could be argued that one of the potential disadvantages of CYP attending an online provision such as Innovate rather than a typical mainstream secondary school, is limits to socialisation with peers, as identified by Tyldesley (2011). Whilst schools’ key role is to educate, they also provide an important context for socialisation outside the family and contribute to CYP’s psychological and social, as well as academic development (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997; Wentzel & Looney, 2007). Socialisation has been described as “the process whereby, through contact with other human beings”, one becomes “a self-aware, knowledgeable human being, skilled in the ways of a given culture and environment” (Giddens, 2006, p. 199). Schools are considered complex systems that provide multiple opportunities for socialisation; through the school itself (e.g., class size, teacher:CYP ratios etc.) as well as through “social interactions and interpersonal relationships that are embedded in the educational process” (Wentzel, 2015, p. 252).

Relationships with peers are of increasing importance through adolescence and can provide companionship, entertainment, help to solve problems, emotional support (Wentzel, Baker and Russell, 2009) and can contribute to CYP's sense of belonging (Cemilcilar, 2010). In one study exploring the wellbeing of 11 to 16-year-olds, CYP stated that the best part about going to school was meeting with their friends (Skrzypiec, Askeil-Williams, Slee & Rudzinski, 2014). Positive peer relationships have been associated with feelings of safety at school (Wentzel, Russell & Baker, 2014), as well as higher levels of attendance and pupil engagement (McGrath & Noble, 2010), wellbeing (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2006) and improved academic achievement (Wentzel, 2017). Conversely, being socially isolated or rejected by peers on an ongoing basis can have a detrimental impact on CYP's engagement, attendance, learning outcomes and wellbeing (Ladd & Burgess, 2001).

Maintaining personal friendships is a concern for CYP who are not able to attend school due to ill health (Sullivan, Fulmer & Zigmond, 2001). Opportunities to meet and spend time with friends, socialise and engage in shared extra-curricular interests and activities are reduced by not being at school, but also due to the impact of their illness, as identified in the current study. Social interactions at school are typically public and can be described as "spontaneous, ongoing, unplanned, immediate and informal" (Murphy & Rodriguez Manzanares, 2008, p. 1068) which over the course of a school day may be very draining for some CYP, particularly those who may be anxious or experiencing physical and cognitive exhaustion. Whilst learning online limits face-to-face interaction and opportunities to meet with peers at school, provisions such as Innovate provide a peer group and increased opportunities for social interaction compared to home tuition. Learning online also enables CYP to have more control over their social interactions and activities, and can reduce potential prejudices, for example relating to appearance, gender, ethnicity, disabilities, academic progress, or socio-economic status (Watson & Gemin, 2008). It is suggested that similarly to schools, Innovate provides a context for socialisation, for example through the set-up of the provision itself (e.g., class sizes, teacher:pupil ratio, technology, as well as organisational ethos), and social interaction with staff and peers in lessons as well as within the provision's wider community (house teams, online clubs, and societies). Some of the benefits to interaction online include that it can be perceived as less intimidating, with less time pressure on CYP than in a face-to-face setting (Warschauer, 1997) and it can encourage greater participation from CYP who are more reserved (Citera, 1998). Research involving higher education distance learners has suggested that students who failed to make connections with others online reported feeling more isolated and stressed (Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins & Shoemaker, 2000) and therefore

ensuring a safe, friendly, and responsive learning environment with a focus on positive relationships, is key to enabling a sense of belongingness and connection for CYP.

Finally, a further challenge relating to the online provision is equality of access, both to the provision; in terms of funding, and within the educational experience it can provide. Article 28 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989) states that CYP have a right to education and that developing different forms of secondary education should be encouraged and made available and accessible to every CYP. As an online AP, Innovate can enable access to education for CYP who experience challenges that impact on their attendance at school. Indeed, it is suggested that there is a growing market of online AP for CYP (DfE, 2019d). However, as identified in the current study, access to funding for the provision can be challenging. LAs and schools using the provision are not always able to offer it to all CYP whom they consider would benefit, due to limited funding or budget constraints. Also, whilst there appears to be a growing number of online APs, not all LAs and schools appear to use these provisions currently, and therefore a young person living in one LA may have access to Innovate (or another similar provision), where a young person in a neighbouring LA with similar needs may not. As suggested above, there appear to be unique factors relating to the online environment which can go some way to meeting the basic psychological needs of CYP unable to attend face-to-face settings such as mainstream school. There has been an increase in demand for APs in recent years as well as a reduction in funding (Danechi, 2018) and it is acknowledged that issues related to funding are challenging. Whilst it is not within the scope of the current study to explore this further, it is important to move towards ensuring equality of access to online provision for CYP where it is considered that this could best meet their needs.

Ensuring equality of access within the provision is also key. CYP have a right to an education which tries to develop them to their fullest potential (UN, 1989). While mainstream schools are required to follow the national curriculum, APs are not; however statutory guidance states they should aim to provide a curriculum “on par with mainstream schools” (DfE, 2013a, p. 10) and enable CYP to study “appropriate accreditation and qualifications” (DfE, 2013a, p. 10). Statutory guidance for CYP with health needs who are unable to attend school, states that they should receive the same opportunities as their peers, including “a broad and balanced curriculum” (DfE, 2013b, p. 7) and “the same range and quality of education” (DfE, 2013b, p. 7) as they would have at their mainstream school. Providing a curriculum on a par with mainstream school has also been viewed as important in terms of supporting effective reintegration to school and positive post school pathways (DfE, 2018b). However, recent research investigating AP (DfE, 2018b) suggested that alongside vocational subjects, and GCSE Mathematics and English, there were a narrow range of additional GCSE subjects available.

Limited subject choice was identified in the current study as a potential barrier to learning online, with one young person being unable to study a preferred subject because the provision was not able to offer the course. Due to the diverse and wide-ranging needs, backgrounds, and abilities of CYP in AP, getting a balance of academic and vocational subjects is challenging (DfE, 2018b). Curriculum in AP has been described as “one which is distinct from that in mainstream schools with, in particular, a more practical and applied focus” (DfE, 2017b, p. 34). Alternative curricula such as vocational and skills-based learning can support CYP who have become disengaged from mainstream education and much of the research and literature around AP is concerned with CYP who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion (DfE, 2017b). It is acknowledged that much less is known about CYP who are in AP due to medical illness or mental health (DfE, 2017b), who may not necessarily have disengaged from school, but rather find attending the mainstream or face-to-face setting challenging due to their needs. It will be important that a broader range of GCSEs, akin to that in mainstream school, is made available for CYP in AP who wish to study these, particularly where the subject may be key to further learning and career opportunities post-school.

Lastly, the current study also identified issues with connectivity and functionality of ICT that could impact on the teaching and learning experience from time to time, as highlighted in previous research (St Leger & Campbell, 2008; Tyldesley, 2011; Wilkie, 2014). Issues regarding connectivity meant that on occasion CYP were not able to access the provision or their live lessons, and the functionality of ICT could also affect the equality of access, where issues with security firewalls or difficulty accessing the necessary software, meant some CYP were unable to use the provision as intended at times. These issues are more unique to the distance learning environment compared to a face-to-face setting which does not need to be reliant on ICT to deliver or access learning. Providing recorded lessons, having access to speedy and efficient ICT support and a flexible teaching staff who can accommodate where possible, goes some way to overcoming these challenges; enabling CYP to maintain a positive learning experience. As previous research has suggested (e.g., Maor & Mitchem, 2015), continued investigation and development of ICT used in online learning is needed to overcome barriers which impact on CYP’s equality of access to online AP. Current findings suggest that Innovate can provide a continuity of learning for CYP unable to attend school due to ill health, who may not be able to attend school regularly, or at times, at all. Therefore, even with occasional ICT issues, online learning can provide access to education which CYP may otherwise not have, one which they can depend on, and where, it is argued, the environment can better meet their needs.

5.6 Implications for practice

Consideration is now given to the implications of this study's findings in relation to the professional practice of EPs, particularly in relation to supporting and promoting the learning, wellbeing, and rights of CYP.

The findings suggest that understanding and meeting the needs of CYP is key to the effectiveness of AP. In their vision for AP reform (DfE, 2018a), one of the government's objectives is to ensure that CYP are appropriately placed in AP that will meet their needs and enable a positive transition back to school or on to post school options. With 79% of CYP in AP having a SEN or disability (DfE, 2019b), EPs may typically be involved with these, and more generally with those experiencing challenges affecting their attendance. This includes those experiencing chronic illness, whom it is suggested that EPs are increasingly likely to work with (Kaffenberger, 2006) and around whom there appears to be a dearth of research relating to AP (DfE, 2017b). EPs have a key role supporting consultation, assessment and planning to ensure that CYP receive educational provision that will best meet their individual needs and lead to meaningful, personal outcomes. They are also well placed to contribute to consultation, training and research concerning the development and progress of AP to support CYP. As Woods (2012, p. 321) suggests, EPs "provide, more or less formally, expert assessment of CYP's needs and link this to patterns of educational provision and placement" and "actively support the development of provisions for CYP that are appropriate to their needs, and which improve outcomes for them".

A fundamental aspect of EP practice is supporting understanding of the needs, including basic psychological needs of CYP, at an individual and school level as well as at a broader systems level, and to support planning and practice to meet these needs and promote wellbeing. As scientist-practitioners with a background in academic and applied psychology, EPs are well placed to apply their knowledge of psychological theory, child development, wellbeing (Barraclough & Machek, 2010; Farrell et al., 2006) and evidence-based practice to support understanding and intervention. Roffey (2016, p. 35) suggests that "both mental health and behaviour are at the core of educational psychologists' work...with individual children, in liaison with families and agencies, in professional development for educators and awareness-raising of good practice across systems" and that EPs have the skills to make a difference to wellbeing at each of these levels. Wellbeing is at the heart of CYP's rights and EPs are uniquely positioned to promote both wellbeing and the realisation of their rights, and to integrate these with educational progress (Jiang et al., 2014).

Working across a breadth of settings including educational, care and community settings (Fallon, et al. 2010) and with a range of partners, EPs typically have “a detailed knowledge of the range of resources that exist in and outside the local education authority” (Farrell et al., 2006, p. 101). They occupy a “strategic vantage point” (Loxley, 1978, p. 103) between education and the wider community, and as such they are able to appreciate the balance of needs and rights of CYP within the wider systems and context. It is part of the EP role to know where CYP can be educated and “to apply evidence-informed understanding to what constitutes suitable provision” (Cockerill, 2019, p. 31). In supporting the development of AP, they can adopt a critical perspective in exploring “pedagogical principles and actions” relating to CYP’s rights (Ziemes et al., 2019, p. 174) and wellbeing.

In exploring pedagogical principles effective in AP, consideration should be given to personalised learning and the extent to which elements of this can meet CYP’s needs and enable success for them. Personalised learning has been a difficult concept to define within education (Pollard & James, 2004). Hartley (2009) suggests that while personalised learning may be associated with a child-centred philosophy; where curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are tailored to the needs of CYP (Paludan, 2006), these factors remain relatively unchanged within mainstream education since personalised learning was first introduced by David Milliband in 2004. It is further suggested that a “lack of teacher preparation, unrealistic policy expectations and high-stakes exam regimes which promote rote learning of prescribed knowledge” (Britten, Schweisfurth & Slade, 2019, p. 32) make the realisation of this form of personalised learning difficult. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of the current study to debate personalised learning further. Current findings echo existing literature (Kendall, 2003; Thomson, 2010; Tyldesley, 2011; DfE, 2012) which suggest that a personalised learning approach; where the learning experience and environment is tailored to the needs, circumstances, and abilities of CYP, is key to the effectiveness of AP for CYP. It may be that Innovate, and similar online APs, are able to provide a deeper level of personalisation compared to mainstream secondary schools through smaller class sizes, higher staff:pupil ratio, greater ability to provide 1:1 support, more flexibility with timetabling, and an ability to offer more control over the learning environment.

With a growing number of online AP (DfE, 2019), it will be important for EPs to have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of these; including their pedagogy, whom they work best for and why. This can support consideration of such provisions when matching CYP to provision that will meet their needs whilst promote their right to an education that enables them to achieve their full potential. For example, as identified in the current study, online provisions may be able to offer a greater sense of safety and security for CYP where their

anonymity and ability to control aspects of the learning environment are key to meeting their needs.

5.7 Implications for future research

As online alternative provisions increase (DfE, 2019), there is a need for further research exploring these and how they can best meet the needs of CYP. The current literature review suggested a dearth of research regarding online provision for CYP experiencing challenges to their attendance at mainstream education, especially those with medical illness or mental health issues. Whilst this study aims to contribute to research around online alternative provision for young people, further research is needed.

There are several possibilities for future research with Innovate which could extend current findings. The effectiveness of the provision could further be explored by considering data related to the use of recorded lessons and the extent to which these are accessed. Young people's progress during their time with the provision could perhaps be better understood by considering baseline and summative assessment data relating to achievement, as well as course progress and qualifications. In line with the government's vision for AP reform (DfE, 2018a), it could also consider the extent to which online provision is effective in supporting a positive transition back to school or on to post school options for young people.

In addition, it would be helpful to consider the effectiveness of the provision for young people with categories of need other than medical illness. By employing a broader sample of those who attend the provision, further understanding about who the provision works for and why, could be gained. It would also be useful to explore why the provision does not appear to work for some young people, for example those who enrol but never attend. This may support better understanding around matching CYP to an online provision compared to a 'face-to-face' AP.

In relation to online AP in general, it may be helpful to further consider the notion of a 'successful student'. Although the young person participant's motivation for learning was implied through the teacher interviews, the current study did not specifically explore CYP's perspective on their motivation to engage with online learning, nor explore aspects of the VLP and teaching practice which may impact on their motivation to engage. Further exploration of these areas could contribute to understanding for whom VLPs might be most effective, as well as to support VLPs to consider aspects of digital pedagogy and the online environment that promote motivation and engagement.

Future research could also support the development of analytic generalisability (Yin, 2009). As a single case study, the current research has limited generalisability, however it does provide rich data relating to Innovate's effectiveness as a provision for young people experiencing health challenges which impact on their attendance at school. Further evidence from similar cases could support the development of analytic generalisability, as Yin (2009, p. 61) suggests, "analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases...will be more powerful than those arising from a single case alone".

5.8 Limitations of present research

The literature review undertaken for the current study revealed a paucity of research relating to the use and effectiveness of online AP, particularly in the UK. A limited evidence base around AP for CYP experiencing medical illness has also been identified (DfE, 2017b). This study aimed to contribute to the evidence base, however as a small scale, single case study, where the main source of data is qualitative, there are inherent limitations to the current research.

In terms of the sample, consideration needs to be given to both the size and potential biases. The researcher chose to limit the number of young person participants to four as they planned to interview other key adults around the young person, as well as Innovate management, and wanted to ensure the qualitative phase of the research was manageable. It was not possible to recruit a LA customer representative for each of the young person participants which would have been useful in gaining a richer and broader customer perspective as well as triangulation of data sources. Due to the limited sample size, caution should be given to generalising the findings to a broader population. However, the aim of the current research was to explore participant views of how Innovate works and why, rather than to generalise.

In relation to potential biases, the four young person participants were identified by the Innovate Regional Manager, and as such the criterion from the stratified purposeful sampling strategy was not employed as initially intended. Due to the element of convenience sampling used, it was not possible to meet all the selection criteria, for example, all four young people had the same category of need; medical illness, and therefore the sample was not representative of the Innovate population as a whole. In addition, it is possible that the manager perceived the young people to be 'good' students, who would be willing to participate and/or likely to express positive views about the provision. Furthermore, the Innovate teacher sampling was limited to members of staff the young people were working with. Young people may have selected teachers to be invited to participate, whom they thought would speak positively about them and their engagement with the provision. The

researcher was mindful of young people's needs, including possible stress, and wanted to enable them to have a choice about whom the researcher could ask about their learning directly.

Employing single interviews is a further limitation to the current research. Carrying out follow up interviews would have allowed opportunities to further clarify participant's responses, ask further questions and potentially gain further depth of response (Lee, 1993). This may be particularly relevant for the telephone interviews, where it is argued, the quality of the data can be affected due to time constraints and lack of visual and non-verbal cues (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). However, telephone interviews were chosen for the young person participants because they were considered less intrusive than face-to-face interviews, particularly as the young people were medically ill. It is suggested that protecting the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants is one advantage of telephone interviews which can enable a sense of safety and improve the quality of responses (Lechuga, 2012; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2003). Only initial exploratory interviews were carried out with Innovate managers due to unforeseen delays in the research timeline. Whilst exploratory interviews enable greater flexibility and the opportunity to ask questions emerging from the immediate context; they are less systematic than semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1980). Innovate managers were interviewed using different questions and not all questions relating to the semi-structured schedule were asked as intended, therefore the data gathered from managers may not have been as comprehensive and rich as it may have been with the inclusion of follow up semi-structured interviews.

The researcher had intended to use member checking to reduce potential bias within the research, however the analysis and completion of the findings extended beyond the initial time frame of the study and as such this was not carried out. As a TEP, the researcher has experience working with vulnerable populations and is trained and skilled in eliciting authentic information. They aimed to establish and maintain a positive rapport throughout the interview, including establishing trust; for example, clearly communicating the purpose and likely duration of the interview and reiterating information regarding confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen, et al. 2017), and ability to end the interview at any time. Throughout the interview process the researcher was careful to be polite, respectful, and non-judgemental, and to listen actively to the participant; being sensitive to how things were said, reflecting back and clarifying participant responses (Kvale, 1996), and checking meaning; which can support the reliability and validity of the data gathered.

During exploratory discussions with Innovate management, it was considered that access to attainment data such as baseline and summative assessment and coursework progress, would

be useful in exploring the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting CYP's learning (RQ1). The researcher also considered this useful in relation to effectiveness of the provision in supporting the learning of the four young people who participated in the interviews. However, this data could not feasibly be provided and therefore it was not possible to explore this through analysis. One of the Innovate managers provided an analysis of their attainment data, which was useful to see, however caution needs to be exercised when interpreting this analysis as it was conducted by the organisation and out with the context of the current study. In contributing to the evidence base around online AP, and Innovate in particular, it would be beneficial for the organisation to have independent research, carried out with comprehensive data and research design, to reduce potential biases and enhance perceived objectivity.

5.9 Relevance of current research in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

CYP's wellbeing, education and the phenomenon of online learning have recently been brought into strong focus as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020). In March 2020, national quarantine restrictions were imposed as part of COVID-19 health and safety measures. Change to everyday life was "immediate, unplanned and out of anyone's control" (BPS: Scottish Division of Educational Psychology, SDEP, 2020, p. 2). Schools across the UK closed. For the majority of CYP, learning moved from traditional face-to-face classrooms to online learning at home, with some schools and nurseries remaining open to CYP of key workers as well as those who may be considered particularly vulnerable (Walters et al., 2022). Where online learning may have been previously considered as an additional or alternative medium of delivering learning to CYP, it became the main medium for teaching and learning, and as described in the current study, a 'lifeline' for educators and CYP during school closures (Petrie et al., 2020).

With the closure of schools as well as after-school activities, and the requirement to stay at home restricting face-to-face social opportunities (Spiteri et al., 2022), CYP experienced loss of routine, structure, supportive relationships and friendships, opportunities, and freedom (BPS: SDEP, 2020). Being mindful of the basic psychological needs described in section 5.5 above, it has been acknowledged that the pandemic has undoubtedly impacted upon CYP's feelings of competence and self-esteem, autonomy and control, and belongingness and connection, with some CYP experiencing anxiety and disconnection and others; a period of growth and learning to cope (BPS: SDEP 2020). There have also been concerns about the impact on the learning outcomes of CYP, with collated research suggesting consistent patterns of less academic progress being made since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an increasing attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils (Education Endowment Fund, EEF, n.d). This is perhaps not

surprising given some of the significant challenges created by the pandemic, and the impact of the pandemic itself on wellbeing; “the mental and emotional shift for teachers, parents, and students is massive. While educators scramble to set up ‘homeschools’, it is necessary to realise that a stressed mental state is not productive to teach or learn” (Petrie et al., 2020, p. 14).

Current findings are echoed in emerging literature and research relating to online learning during the pandemic. Before considering this further, it is important to acknowledge the unique context presented by the pandemic and to make a clear distinction between online learning designed as such (for example that provided by Innovate, an established online provider with their own virtual learning platform and ongoing practice in digital pedagogy) and the online learning which was required as a matter of urgency due to school closures. It is acknowledged that many countries across the world were not ready for the sudden shift to online teaching and learning (Petrie et al., 2020) which created significant challenges for CYP, families and teachers.

At a moment’s notice teachers were required to adapt to supporting CYP’s learning and wellbeing remotely through ICT, employing digital technologies and pedagogies with varying levels of competence and confidence and often with insufficient training (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021); a barrier to effective online learning identified in both current and previous research (Duckworth, 2005; Tyldesley, 2011). Recent guidance from the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) (2020) stressed the importance of support for teachers to use ICT; despite a previous recommendation to address teacher training for online learning from Becta in 2008 (Lewin et al., 2008). In March 2020, only four percent of teachers were carrying out online lessons in real time; compared to fifty-four percent of teachers in January 2021 (Montacute & Cullinane, 2021). Teachers quickly developed skills and adapted pedagogies to support CYP’s learning during initial school closures (Enser, 2020; Starkey et al., 2021). Support for digital pedagogy was also provided, for example, through Oak National Academy teaching and learning platform (Greenhow, Lewin & Willet, 2021). If online and/or blended learning opportunities for CYP are to continue and develop, (or are indeed required again as the main medium of delivering learning nationwide), then it is essential that those required to deliver are provided with ongoing training and support to enable them to feel competent and confident doing so, in turn contributing to an effective teaching and learning experience for both teachers and CYP.

The initial lack of synchronous, real time learning and connection with teachers and peers was also identified in a European study exploring parental experiences of home-schooling during the first wave of the pandemic (Thorell, et al., 2020). It suggested that CYP in the UK spent about five percent of their school time in contact with teachers and about three percent in

contact with peers (Thorell et al., 2020). Whilst the current study identified the combination of both synchronous and asynchronous learning as a facilitative factor to online learning, the emphasis within the context of Innovate was on the flexibility afforded to CYP through asynchronous learning. Emerging research within the context of school closures and other social restrictions suggests that synchronous learning opportunities are vital to enable connection to others and promote a sense of belonging (Wesier et al., 2018).

A further factor impacting CYP's sense of belonging and connection during school closures was equality of access to technology (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; OECD, 2020). Issues relating to the digital divide were once again brought to the fore, with some CYP unable to access social and learning opportunities due to a lack of technology and/or a reliable internet connection (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021). Issues with ICT and connectivity are well documented in the literature as inhibiting the effectiveness of online learning. In response to lack of access to technology and/or reliable internet connection, the UK Government provided 1.3 million laptops and tablets as well as 4G routers and free mobile data to CYP who needed them (Department for Education, 2020). Fifty-two percent of teachers cited this as the single most helpful intervention to help disadvantaged CYP during the period of school closures (Montacute & Cullinane, 2021). CYP also suggested that being provided with the resources they required at home enabled them to complete more work (Child Poverty Action Group, CPAG, 2020). Continuing to address issues relating to the digital divide remain key to ensuring equitable and inclusive access to online learning and social opportunities for CYP when needed.

In relation to CYP's views about online learning during school closures, one survey suggested that for many, home learning was a positive and even preferable learning experience, whilst for others it was difficult due to home circumstances, including the ability to concentrate and 'self-teach' (Popoola & Sivers, 2021); views echoed by CYP with whom the researcher worked in her role as TEP during school closures. CYP spent around fifty percent of their school time working independently during the first wave of the pandemic, and thirty percent being supported by a parent (Thorell et al., 2020). The current study acknowledges parental support as key to the success of online learning for CYP. However, during the pandemic, parents were often required to manage additional and competing responsibilities, such as work or caregiving (ONS, 2020); with one study suggesting that forty-one percent of parents felt they did not have enough time to support their children with online learning (Montacute & Cullinane, 2021).

A small-scale qualitative study carried out in Scotland suggested that learning online provided an "element of control and flexibility" (McCorkell & Lobo, 2021, p. 80) for CYP, including choice over the pace and order of activities and the range of activities provided. The study further

suggested that learning from home required CYP to be able to work with a level of independence in terms of self-regulation and motivation, a finding also echoed in current and previous research (see Hrastinski, 2009; Widjaja & Chen, 2017).

Other research has further acknowledged the importance of regular communication between CYP, teachers, and parents, via digital means and telephone calls, which included personalised support (CPAG, 2020); key facilitators of online provision identified in the current study. CYP in secondary school reported completing a greater amount of work if they were in regular communication with their teachers, where the converse was also true.

Learning online from home during school closures has reduced anxieties for some CYP who experienced bullying or anxiety relating to social pressures, due to decreased contact with peers (Thorell et al., 2021) and a reduction in social expectations or pressures; a finding also identified in the current study and shared by some CYP with whom the researcher worked in her role as TEP during school closures. Blended learning opportunities continue to have a place for supporting CYP experiencing these challenges, where a mixture of face-to face and online learning could support a reduction in anxiety, and a greater sense of control over their learning environment, whilst continuing to provide a level of socialisation that is manageable and promotes a sense of connection and belonging. Indeed, creating more flexible and dynamic learning opportunities through online learning for CYP who find it difficult to attend school is a recommendation made by EPs following a survey of CYP during the pandemic (Sivers et al., 2021).

As evident in the literature and current findings, online learning is not without its challenges, and these have been highlighted most recently within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic has provided the opportunity to consider the opportunities of online learning (Thorell et al., 2021), illustrating “the importance of moving learning experiences beyond the traditional school building and hours, resulting in more real-world application of content and increasing frequency of authentic experiences for students” (Thorton, n.d.). It is argued that educational policy needs to take this into account; rather than focusing on digital resources it should consider the transformation of educational models which support effective online pedagogical practice and professional learning for teachers (Starkey et al., 2021).

“Digital technology allows us to find entirely new answers to what people learn, how people learn, where people learn and when they learn. Technology can enable teachers and students to access specialised materials well beyond textbooks, in multiple formats and in ways that can bridge time and space”

(Petrie et al., 2020, p. 4).

The researcher believes that online learning and digital technologies continue to have a place in enabling access to education which meets the needs of CYP and recognises their individual strengths, interests, and circumstances. As identified in the current study and beyond, effective online learning can offer a lifeline where access to physical school buildings and classrooms are not possible. It can enable a sense of connection and belonging in the absence of face-to-face interactions. It can offer flexibility and a sense of control over the learning experience. For those experiencing stress and anxiety about the return to school following a period of closure, blended learning opportunities can provide a safe learning environment with consistent access to learning and more manageable social interaction, while reducing social pressures and anxieties. As a TEP, the researcher is aware of a virtual academy which has been recently established in their local authority to this end.

5.9.1 Relevance for practice in light of COVID-19

Whether CYP's learning takes place in a physical or virtual learning environment, understanding and meeting their basic psychological needs, and facilitating inclusion through access to appropriate resources and effective teaching and learning practices are key. As discussed in section 5.5 above, EPs have a core role in applying psychological theory to promote understanding of CYP's needs and wellbeing, supporting the bridging of theory to practice for those supporting CYP, as well as providing guidance and advice on how CYP can best be supported.

With an increased focus on the wellbeing of CYP during the COVID-19 pandemic, research suggests that supporting the understanding of CYP's needs during this time has been particularly valued by schools (Sutherland, 2021). Promoting CYP's right to have their views heard and taken into account, EPs have carried out research seeking the views of CYP regarding their experiences of online learning at home during the pandemic (e.g. McCorkell & Lobo, 2021; Popoola & Sivers, 2021) to help inform educational policy and practice (Sivers et al., 2021). Further work at a national level has included the production of guidance informed by theories also applied in the current study, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943, 1954), Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) (1985, 2002) and Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological framework (1979) to help inform effective and compassionate transitions for CYP and staff as they returned to school buildings (BPS, 2020, BPS; SDEP, 2020).

Recently, SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002) has been applied to CYP's online learning during the pandemic (Chui, 2022). Whilst it has previously been applied to face-to-face learning environments to support understanding of environmental and psychological factors that impact on CYP's wellbeing, motivation, and engagement with learning (Chiu, Lin & Lonka,

2021), there is a dearth of research exploring how it can be applied specifically to improving digital pedagogy for CYP of school-age (Chiu, 2022). It is suggested that developing CYP's competence in self-directed and collaborative online learning is key (Starkey et al., 2021) and that further research is needed to explore how online learning and the use of technology can enhance CYP's motivation and engagement with learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020); an area which EPs may be able to contribute to.

Chui (2022) argues that satisfying the basic needs as outlined in SDT is always important in online learning, but that the relationship and strengths of these needs vary between contexts. Whilst most studies applying SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002) to CYP's learning within face-to-face classrooms suggest autonomy support as one of the most important factors relating to CYP's engagement (Chui, 2022), perceived relatedness was found to be the most important predictor of CYP's engagement in online learning during school closures (Chui, 2022). The relationship and strengths of basic psychological needs within the child or young person's individual context is an important consideration for EPs matching need to suitable provision. The study further postulated that within the context of the pandemic; the loss and change experienced by CYP and the unfamiliarity of remote learning have resulted in greater needs relating to sense of belonging and connection, and this should be the focus of support, a view congruent with national guidance from EPs regarding reconnecting school communities following periods of school closure (BPS; SDEP, 2020). This can be considered in line with research arguing the importance of synchronous, 'real time' learning and social interaction opportunities with teachers and peers, essential to promoting a sense of belonging (Wesier et al., 2018).

With motivation being a key factor in relation to the effectiveness of online learning, it is argued that understanding how to motivate CYP of school-age through an online learning medium is key. Given the recent necessity to adapt to online learning, as well as the growing number of online provisions, it will be important for EPs to be aware of online pedagogies which can support its effectiveness for CYP, including learner motivation and engagement. Chui (2022) suggests the following online teacher practices with CYP of school-age which provide:

- autonomy support, including considering CYP's perspectives, providing choices, avoiding the use of controlling language and reducing stress and demands, competence support; communicating clear expectations, giving feedback, expressing confidence in CYP, using multiple user-friendly functions, and enabling peers to share information with each other,

- belongingness support, including providing emotional and motivational support, showing care and acceptance, and providing help when needed, using collaborative learning opportunities and small group discussions to foster trusting peer relationships.

In relation to belongingness support, Chui (2022) further suggests that schools and teachers delivering online learning could consider creating an online space to socially interact with teachers and peers, as well as online peer support groups and mental health activities which enable CYP to express their emotions, a further area which EPs may be able to contribute to. Employing digital technology to support the wellbeing of CYP, families and school staff has been key to the work of EPs during the pandemic, for example through videoconferencing, the provision of online training and the use of safe, virtual spaces to meet with CYP, (see Rait, n.d.). With mental health and wellbeing at the core of EP's work (Roffey, 2016), they are well placed to support schools and provisions to develop online spaces and pedagogies that promote connection and positive mental health for CYP. It will be important for EPs to be aware of research emerging from the pandemic around online learning, wellbeing, and motivation, as they continue to have a key role in bridging existing psychological theory and recent findings relating to wellbeing and motivation to support the development of effective online pedagogy in meeting the basic psychological needs of CYP.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information and consent form for Innovate management



INFORMATION SHEET

Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

Dear X,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project exploring Innovate and how it supports young people and their learning. The research will be carried out in conjunction with The University of Manchester. The following information explains the purpose of the research and what it will involve. Please take time to read this carefully and ask if there is anything which is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this. If you are happy to give your consent to participate, please sign where appropriate and return to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Who will conduct the research?

My name is Jenny Templeton and I am a Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist undertaking the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. As part of my training I am required to undertake a piece of research with the purpose of contributing to the literature around supporting young people. The research will be written up as a thesis.

Title of the research

'Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school'.

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of the research is to explore the Innovate and how effective it is in supporting young people and their learning. The study will take place this school year, 2012-2013.

The study will focus on Innovate as an alternative medium to deliver learning to young people experiencing challenges to attending school and will seek the views of key stakeholders including young people, parents/carers, school staff/key person for education and Innovate staff in exploring its effectiveness.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

The research will be carried out in two phases. Within phase one, you will be asked to provide to the researcher fully anonymised data on multiple young people (including pupil demographics and referral data, baseline and summative assessment regarding pupil ability, pupil attendance behaviour and contribution and coursework progress).

Within phase two, you will be asked to identify potential participants enrolled with your provision, gain their permission to allow the researcher access to their data gathered by you, and provide contact details for these to enable the researcher to approach them in order to

seek fully informed consent for participation in the study. You will also be invited to participate in an audio-recorded interview lasting no longer than 1 hour.

What will happen to the data collected?

All information and results collected will be made anonymous and used in evaluating the effectiveness of Innovate, which will then be written up as a thesis. The results of the research will be shared with you and a written report of these can be provided.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All personal information and details will remain confidential and will be anonymised. Following the study, all sensitive information will be destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act. The research will be carried out within The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Health Professions Council's Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. The research has received ethical approval by The University of Manchester Research and Ethics Committee.

Criminal Records Check

I have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure held within the School of Education at the university.

Contacts for further information

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Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
Educational Support and Inclusion
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What if something goes wrong?

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

If you are happy with the above information and consent to participate, please read, initial and sign the attached consent form and return it in the SAE provided.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to working with you.

Yours Sincerely,

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
The University of Manchester

Appendix B: Introductory information sheet for parents



INFORMATION SHEET - Introduction for Parents/Carers

Exploring virtual learning to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Jenny Templeton and I am a Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist undertaking the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. As part of my training I am carrying out a research project to explore Innovate and how it supports young people and their learning.

Four young people will be invited to participate in the research, as well as their parents/carers, a key person for their education and a member of Innovate staff who teaches them. Participants will be asked to take part in an interview (lasting no longer than 30 minutes for the young person and no longer than 1 hour for parents/carers) in order to share their views of Innovate and how it supports the young person. The views of young people as well as their parents are an important and valuable part of the research. Some of the benefits of taking part in the study include the opportunity for your child to say what they think about Innovate and how it could be developed further to support them and other young people.

If you and your child are interested in participating in the research, a full information sheet and consent form can be provided for your further consideration.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Yours Sincerely,

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist

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Appendix C: Content analysis of Innovate inspection report

Categories, codes, and frequencies relating to RQs 1 & 2

Key:

- **CATEGORY**
- meaning unit (text coded)
- **CODE**
- Frequencies are marked with tally marks, e.g. III at the end of each category

RQ1: How effective is Innovate in supporting the learning of young people experiencing challenges to attending school?

POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Teachers, using online learning strategies, help students to become less anxious about their studies – **REDUCED ANXIETY**
- to take responsibility for their own learning – **RESPONSIBILITY FOR OWN LEARNING**
- [Learning from home in a familiar environment] reduces their anxiety - **REDUCED ANXIETY**
- students with ill-health or other barriers to leaving home can participate in learning and gain relevant qualifications – **ACCESS TO LEARNING**
- They have created a safe and supportive learning environment to enable students who have complex needs and learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who have been unable to attend school or college, to achieve qualifications and improve their life chances – **ACCESS TO LEARNING**
- the majority of students make good progress in their lessons – **YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE GOOD PROGRESS IN THEIR LEARNING**
- students enjoy their learning, participate well in lessons and develop their knowledge and skills – **YOUNG PEOPLE ENJOY LEARNING, YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS**
- Students improve their self-esteem and develop confidence in their ability to learn – **INCREASED CONFIDENCE**
- Teachers develop students' mathematics and English skills well in lessons - **YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS**
- [Teachers] teach interesting lessons which improve students' knowledge and understanding. - **YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE GOOD PROGRESS IN THEIR LEARNING**
- Students develop confidence to ask and respond to questions in lessons before they share their ideas with the group (*because of private chat*) – **INCREASED CONFIDENCE**
- Students with a range of learning difficulties and /or disabilities, who have previously found it difficult to attend school or college, develop their confidence and self-esteem in a safe learning environment - **INCREASED CONFIDENCE**
- [Students] enjoy learning online and take pride in their work. - **YOUNG PEOPLE ENJOY LEARNING, YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR WORK**
- Students' behaviour is good. – **GOOD BEHAVIOUR IN LESSONS**
- Students feel safe in the Innovate learning environment and know how to report any concerns. Students feel safe, and are safe, from bullying and abuse – **YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL SAFE**
- Students develop good working relationships with their teachers and other students within their lessons where they communicate with 'text chat'. – **GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS AND PEERS**
- They [students] support each other well; for example, they praise each other for good work and express sympathy if a peer is feeling unwell in a lesson. – **PEERS SUPPORT EACH OTHER**

- Students *make good progress in lessons* and *improve in confidence and self-esteem*, which enables them to participate positively in their learning. - **YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE GOOD PROGRESS IN THEIR LEARNING, INCREASED CONFIDENCE**
- In particular, *students with autism or those with anxiety make good progress* and benefit from online learning. – **YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE GOOD PROGRESS IN THEIR LEARNING**
- *Students develop skills appropriate to further study and their chosen careers*. For example, *students improve their essay writing skills* well and are *encouraged to support and work collaboratively with others in their class* – **YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS, PEERS SUPPORT EACH OTHER**

YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE GOOD PROGRESS IN THEIR LEARNING – IIII

INCREASED CONFIDENCE – IIII

YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS – III

REDUCED ANXIETY – II

PEERS SUPPORT EACH OTHER – II

ACCESS TO LEARNING – II

YOUNG PEOPLE ENJOY LEARNING – II

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OWN LEARNING – I

YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR WORK – I

GOOD BEHAVIOUR IN LESSONS – I

YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL SAFE – I

GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS AND PEERS – I

CURRICULUM ENABLES PROGRESSION ROUTES

- *Leaders have ensured that the curriculum provides good progression routes for students*, including to apprenticeships, traineeships, and access to higher education courses - **CURRICULUM ENABLES PROGRESSION ROUTES**
- They work effectively with local employers and with eight local authorities *to develop courses to meet local and regional skills needs*. - **CURRICULUM ENABLES PROGRESSION ROUTES**

CURRICULUM ENABLES PROGRESSION ROUTES – II

RQ2: What are the perceived facilitators/barriers to the effectiveness of Innovate?

SAFE AND SECURE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- *safe and supportive* learning environment – **SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**
- The *arrangements for safeguarding are effective* – **EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS**
- Leaders and managers have implemented *robust policies and procedures to keep students safe*, including a detailed single central register – **ROBUST POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**
- *Recruitment processes are rigorous; all staff are checked to ensure that they are safe to work with children and vulnerable adults* - **ROBUST POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

- Teachers have a good understanding of the signs of abuse and know how to report any concerns about students - **EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS**
- Leaders and managers *have ensured that systems supporting online learning are secure and protect students well* – **SECURE VIRTUAL PLATFORM**
- *Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online*
- Staff receive high quality training, including in relation to the ‘Prevent’ duty prior to starting employment and through frequent updates – **EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS**
- *Teachers use private conversations effectively during online lessons* to enable less confident or anxious students to *communicate with them confidentially* - **SECURE VIRTUAL PLATFORM**
- *safe learning environment* - **SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**
- They enjoy *being able to communicate confidentially with teachers during lessons to express their views or concerns safely* - **SECURE VIRTUAL PLATFORM**
- [Students] understand how to keep themselves safe online and are confident in using the *highly secure educational systems*. For example, staff and students are *only able to communicate internally within the organisation on the Innovate systems*. - **SECURE VIRTUAL PLATFORM**
- *Teachers deal with the very few behaviour issues swiftly and effectively and ensure that they do not disrupt learning.* – **CONTROL OVER LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

SECURE VIRTUAL PLATFORM – IIII

EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS - III

SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – II

ROBUST POLICIES AND PROCEDURES – II

CONTROL OVER LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – I

PERSONALISED APPROACH

- *highly individualised programmes to meet the needs of students* – **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**
- Managers and teachers have designed *creative resources*, and *make effective use of teaching styles that enable students to access learning in the way that suits them best* – **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**
- *Teachers gather detailed information on the skills and knowledge that students have* when they start their course. They *use this information well to teach lessons which interest and challenge students* – **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**
- *Small group sizes enable teachers to know their students well and to adapt their lessons to meet their needs* – **SMALL CLASS SIZE**
- *[Teachers] provide very good, individualised support during lessons* to ensure that students participate fully in learning - **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**
- *Teachers use tutorial lessons well to set and monitor targets for students related to the subjects they are studying, to support them with their work and to discuss any issues that may affect their learning.* - **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**
- *teachers have a good understanding of how students are feeling and are able to respond well to each student’s needs and provide them with appropriate support.* - **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**

- Well-qualified staff provide useful impartial careers advice and guidance. They use weekly pastoral lessons well to provide students with relevant information, advice and guidance on their next steps. - **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**
- Staff provide students with relevant work experience placements early in their course. They select work placements that meet students' interests and are relevant to their future career plans - **TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON**
- [Leaders and managers] have designed a curriculum with a wide range of courses and subjects at varying levels of learning that caters well for student's different starting points and aspirations – **FLEXIBILITY WITHIN CURRICULUM**

TAILORED TO YOUNG PERSON – IIIII III

SMALL CLASS SIZE - I

FLEXIBILITY WITHIN CURRICULUM – I

QUALITY OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Teachers, who are highly skilled and experienced – **SKILLED STAFF**
- Teachers provide high-quality lessons through online learning – **HIGH QUALITY LESSONS**
- Teachers give very positive and constructive verbal feedback to students – **HELPFUL FEEDBACK FOR STUDENTS**
- Leaders and managers have put robust arrangements in place to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment – **QUALITY ASSURANCE**
- Teachers provide students with very detailed feedback on their work, which ensures they are clear about what they need to do to improve further, or how to gain higher grades - **HELPFUL FEEDBACK FOR STUDENTS**
- Teachers are well qualified – **SKILLED STAFF**
- [Teachers] use their subject knowledge skillfully to teach interesting lessons which improve students' knowledge and understanding - **SKILLED STAFF**
- [Teachers] provide very good, individualised support during lessons to ensure that students participate fully in learning – **SUPPORTIVE STAFF**
- Small group sizes enable teachers to know their students well and to adapt their lessons to meet their needs -- **SUPPORTIVE STAFF**
- Teachers use tutorial lessons well to set and monitor targets for students related to the subjects they are studying, to support them with their work and to discuss any issues that may affect their learning - **SUPPORTIVE STAFF**
- [Teachers] provide very good, individualised support during lessons to ensure that students participate fully in learning - **SUPPORTIVE STAFF**
- teachers have a good understanding of how students are feeling and are able to respond well to each student's needs and provide them with appropriate support - **SUPPORTIVE STAFF**
- [Teachers provide] a calm and positive learning environment for students. - **SUPPORTIVE STAFF**

SUPPORTIVE STAFF – IIIII I

SKILLED STAFF – III

HELPFUL FEEDBACK FOR STUDENTS – II

HIGH QUALITY LESSONS – I

QUALITY ASSURANCE - I

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Teachers take part in an extensive and relevant staff development programme - **TRAINING**
- They access good internal training, as well as that provided by awarding bodies and other external organisations - **TRAINING**
- Leaders support staff well to improve their professional knowledge and skills – **MANAGEMENT SUPPORT**
- [Managers] have provided student support advisers with high-quality training – **MANAGEMENT SUPPORT**
- Staff receive high-quality training - **TRAINING**

TRAINING – IIII

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT FOR CPD - II

DEVELOP KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS - I

FLEXIBILITY

- students' access [learning] remotely, usually from their homes. – **REMOTE ACCESS**
- [Remote learning] enables students who have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities to learn within a familiar environment – **REMOTE ACCESS**
- Teachers ensure that the lessons are of an appropriate length to allow students to focus fully on their learning without the distractions of a conventional classroom setting – **SHORTER LESSONS**
- all lessons are recorded so that students who are unable to attend can follow the lesson online at a later date – **FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES (SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS)**

REMOTE ACCESS – II

SHORTER LESSONS – I

FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES (SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS) – I

INVOLVING PARENTS

- Teachers develop very good relationships with students' parents. – **INVOLVING PARENTS**
- Teachers keep parents well informed of students' progress through regular telephone conversations and termly reports - **INVOLVING PARENTS**
- Parents make good use of an online parent portal to understand the progress that student's make, including their attendance at, and engagement in, lessons. - **INVOLVING PARENTS**

INVOLVING PARENTS – III

ETHOS

- Leaders and managers have high expectations of staff and students – **HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

- [Teachers] encourage [students] to share their ideas with other students – **WORKING COLLABORATIVELY**
- staff have *high aspirations* for their students – **HIGH ASPIRATIONS**
- Teachers routinely praise the support students provide to each other in lessons – **BEING SUPPORTIVE**
- Leaders, managers and teachers *promote a culture of respect and tolerance* within the learning environment – **RESPECT AND TOLERANCE**

HIGH EXPECTATIONS - I

HIGH ASPIRATIONS - I

WORKING COLLABORATIVELY - I

BEING SUPPORTIVE - I

RESPECT AND TOLERANCE – I

BARRIERS

- *In a small minority of lessons teachers do not provide students with sufficiently interesting tasks or good visual stimulation.* As a result, at times students do not make the progress of which they are capable – **QUALITY OF LESSON CAN LIMIT PROGRESS**
- Teachers do not routinely receive information about students' attendance at these sessions and so are not always sure that students have caught up with missed work prior to the next lesson. – **LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT USE OF RECORDED LESSONS TO INFORM PROGRESS**
- Teachers do not help students to set targets that support them to improve their personal and social skills. For example, teachers do not encourage students, particularly those with low confidence, to develop their speaking skills well enough during lessons. – **LIMITED TARGET SETTING TO DEVELOP PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS**
- Leaders and managers do not share their insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation well enough to ensure that all managers understand the improvements that they need to make – **LIMIT TO IMPROVEMENT PLANNING**
- observers do not routinely provide teachers with sufficient detail about what they need to do to improve. As a result, this slows improvements in teaching, learning and assessment - **LIMIT TO IMPROVEMENT PLANNING**
- Senior leaders do not, however, share their improvement plans or the monitoring of improvements sufficiently well. As a result, managers do not know how well they contribute to the improvement of the organisation or the progress being made, so that they can contribute further - **LIMIT TO IMPROVEMENT PLANNING**
- no governance arrangements in place. **LIMITED ACCOUNTABILITY /SCRUTINY**
- there is insufficient challenge and support for senior leaders in evaluating their specific areas of responsibility, such as for students with high needs - **LIMIT TO IMPROVEMENT PLANNING**

LIMIT TO IMPROVEMENT PLANNING – IIII

QUALITY OF LESSON CAN LIMIT PROGRESS – I

LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT USE OF RECORDED LESSONS TO INFORM PROGRESS – I

LIMITED TARGET SETTING TO DEVELOP PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS – I

LIMITED ACCOUNTABILITY /SCRUTINY – I

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- *Students' attendance and punctuality* require improvement – **STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY**
- *Leaders should share their plans for improvement more effectively* with managers so that they collectively understand the main strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, how they are being improved and the progress being made – **EVALUATION AND PLANNING PROCESSES**
- Leaders have plans to establish a board of governors to improve the *scrutiny of their work* –**SCRUTINY OF WORK**
- *Ensure that teachers regularly set and record targets for students that refer to the personal and social skills they need*, including for those students with education, health and care plans, so that *students make rapid progress in developing their skills* – **TARGET SETTING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FOR PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS**
- *Improve students' attendance and punctuality so that they benefit from regular learning opportunities.* - **STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY**
- *Ensure that students catch up on missed lessons quickly so that they are able to build on prior learning* – **MISSED LESSON CATCH UP TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF LEARNING**

STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY – II

MISSED LESSONS CATCH UP TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF LEARNING – I

EVALUATION AND PLANNING PROCESSES – I

SCRUTINY OF WORK – I

TARGET SETTING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FOR PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS – I

Appendix D: Interview schedule for young people enrolled in Innovate

Preface: Explain who I am, what I am doing and restate confidentiality, right to withdraw etc.

Thanks for agreeing to spend some more time with me. Your views are important and will help me to understand more about Innovate. I am going to record our time together to help me think about what you have said. If at any point you wish to stop, just let me know and we will stop. Once we have finished, if there is anything you are unhappy with, let me know as I am happy to delete it.

I'll start by asking you some general questions about you, and then I'll go on to ask you about Innovate.

General:

Name: _____ Gender: _____ Age: _____
Year Group: _____ School: _____

1. How long have you used Innovate for?
2. What subjects are you studying with Innovate?
3. How many times a week do you log on?
4. How easy is it to use Innovate?
Probes: Are you able to log on when you need to? Did you receive enough information about it before you started? If there are any technical problems, are they resolved quickly?
5. How are you supported to use Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Who helps you? What helps you? How do you feel about that?
6. How do you feel Innovate supports your learning outside school?
Probes: Can you tell me more? What does 'Innovate' do that school couldn't? What can school do that 'Innovate' can't?
7. Has Innovate made a difference to you? If so, in what way?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Can you give me an example?
8. What do you like about Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?
9. What do you dislike about Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?
10. How could Innovate be improved?
Probes: Can you tell me more? How?

Appendix E: Interview schedule for parents/carers

Preface: Explain who I am, what I am doing and restate confidentiality, right to withdraw etc.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. Your views are important and will help me to understand more about Innovate. I am going to record the interview to help me think about what you have said. If at any point you wish to stop, just let me know. Once we have finished, if there is anything you are unhappy with, let me know as I am happy to delete it.

1. How did you find out about Innovate?
Probes: Who told you? Did you feel you had enough information before your child started? Did you know who to contact with any questions you might have?

2. How is contact between you/your child and school maintained during their time with Innovate?
Probes: Who do you/your child have contact with? How often? How did you feel about that?

3. How do you feel Innovate supports your child's learning outside school?
Probes: Can you tell me more? What does Innovate do that school can't? What can school do that Innovate can't?

4. Has Innovate made a difference to your child? If so, in what way?
Probes: Can you tell me more? How do you know?

5. What facilitates your child's engagement with Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?

6. What inhibits your child's engagement with Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?

7. How could Innovate be improved/developed?
Probes: Can you tell me more?

Appendix F: Interview schedule for Innovate staff

Preface: Explain who I am, what I am doing and restate confidentiality, right to withdraw etc.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. Your views are important and will help me to understand more about Innovate. I am going to record the interview to help me think about what you have said. If at any point you wish to stop, just let me know. Once we have finished, if there is anything you are unhappy with, let me know as I am happy to delete it.

1. In what way do you think you provide an alternative learning experience to the young people enrolled with Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?
2. What do you think Innovate offers X?
Probes: Can you tell me more? What does Innovate offer that school doesn't? What does school offer that Innovate doesn't?
3. Do you feel X values Innovate?
Probes: How do you know? Why do you think they do?
4. Have you noticed changes in X during his/her time using Innovate? What are they?
Probes: Can you tell me more? How do you know?
5. What factors facilitate the effectiveness of Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?
6. What factors inhibit the effectiveness of Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?

Appendix G: Interview schedule for Innovate customer/key person for education

Preface: Explain who I am, what I am doing and restate confidentiality, right to withdraw etc.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. Your views are important and will help me to understand more about Innovate. I am going to record the interview to help me think about what you have said. If at any point you wish to stop, just let me know. Once we have finished, if there is anything you are unhappy with, let me know as I am happy to delete it.

1. Can you tell me a bit more about your role with X and Innovate?
Probes: How often do you have contact with X? How successful/unsuccessful did you feel that was? Why?
2. What were the main reasons X was selected for Innovate?
Probes: Why? Can you tell me a bit more?
3. What do you think Innovate offers young people?
Probes: Can you tell me more? What does Innovate offer that school doesn't? What does school offer that Innovate doesn't?
4. Have you noticed changes in X since enrolling with Innovate? What are they?
Probes: Can you tell me more?
5. What do you need to support you in your role with X and Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me a bit more about that? How successful/unsuccessful do you feel that was? Why?
6. What factors facilitate the effectiveness of Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?
7. What factors inhibit the effectiveness of Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that?
8. Do you have any other thoughts around Innovate?
Probes: Positives? Negatives? Improvements/developments?

Appendix H: Interview schedule for Innovate management team member

Preface: Explain who I am, what I am doing and restate confidentiality, right to withdraw etc.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. Your views are important and will help me to understand more about Innovate. I am going to record the interview to help me think about what you have said. If at any point you wish to stop, just let me know. Once we have finished, if there is anything you are unhappy with, let me know as I am happy to delete it.

1. What was the thinking behind the creation of Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more?
2. What were the initial aims of Innovate? Have these changed over time?
Probes: Can you tell me more? In what way? Why?
3. In what way do you think you provide an alternative learning experience to the young people enrolled with Innovate?
Probes: Can you tell me more? Why is that? In your view, what are the main differences between Innovate and other provisions for the young people?
4. What does Innovate enable young people to do?
Probes: Can you tell me more? In what way?
5. Do you think Innovate makes a positive difference to young people?
Probes: In what way?
6. How does Innovate measure success?
Probes: Can you tell me more?
7. How do you see Innovate developing in the future?
Probes: In 5 years time? In 10 years time?

Appendix I: Information sheet and consent form for young people



Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

INFORMATION SHEET

I would like to invite you to take part in a research project looking at how Innovate supports you and your learning. The research is being carried out as part of my training for the Doctorate in Educational & Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information sheet carefully and discuss it with your parents if you wish. Please ask if there is anything which is not clear or if you would like more information. Thanks for reading this. If you agree to take part, please sign and initial the consent form and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Who will conduct the research?

My name is Jenny Templeton and I am a Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist studying the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. As part of my training, I am carrying out a piece of research around Innovate. I will write the research up as a document called a thesis.

Title of the research

'Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school'.

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of the research is to explore Innovate and how it supports young people and their learning. The study will take place this school year, 2012-2013.

It will explore the virtual learning environment created by Innovate as an alternative way for young people to carry out their learning when they are not in school. As part of the study, I would like to ask your views about using Innovate and how it works for you. I will also ask your parents/carers for their views on how well Innovate works, as well as a teacher or learning mentor from your school and a member of the Innovate team.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been asked to take part in this research because you are carrying out some of your learning online with Innovate. Your views and opinions are important and a valuable part of the research. Three other young people and their parents/carers will also be asked to take part in the project.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you agree to take part in the study you will be asked to take part in a telephone interview or if you prefer, an online interview using a Innovate virtual classroom. The interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and will last no longer than 30 minutes. There are

around 10 questions to find out your views around Innovate and how it supports your learning. If you feel you have more to say after 30 minutes, I might arrange to contact you at another time to talk to you again.

I will also ask Innovate to tell me about how you're getting on; this might include information about your attendance, progress and how you get on using Innovate. All information will remain confidential and will be anonymised (i.e. you will not be able to be identified from the information). After the project is complete, this information will be destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

All information collected will be made anonymous (i.e. you will not be able to be identified from the information) and used to explore how well Innovate works for young people. It will then be written up as a document called a thesis. The results of the research will also be shared with Innovate.

What happens if I decide not to take part or if I change my mind?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you do decide to take part you should keep this information sheet and sign the attached consent form which you can send back to me using the envelope provided. It would be very helpful if you could send this back to me within 2 weeks. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind at any time and you don't have to give a reason, just let me know you no longer want to take part. Also, choosing to take part or not take part in the study will have no affect on your marks, assessments or learning with Innovate.

What are some of the possible benefits of taking part?

Some of the benefits of taking part in the study include the opportunity for you to say what you think about Innovate and how it could be developed further to support you and other young people.

Where will the research be conducted?

The interview will be take place over the phone or using one of Innovate's online classrooms, at a suitable time agreed by you, me and your parents/carers.

Contact for further information

If you would like any more information, or you would like to talk about anything further, please get in touch with me or my supervisor at the addresses below.

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
Educational Support and Inclusion
Psychology
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number (work): 01397 707 350

Email address:

jenny.templeton@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Professor Kevin Woods
Programme Director
Doctorate in Educational & Child

Educational Support and Inclusion
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number: 0161 275 3511

What if something goes wrong?

If there are any issues about the project that you would prefer not to discuss with me or my supervisor, you can contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 0161 275 8093.

If you are happy with the above information and would like to take part, please read, initial and sign the attached consent form and return it in the envelope provided.

Thanks for reading this, I look forward to meeting you.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Templeton." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
The University of Manchester

Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to take part please sign and initial the consent form below.

To be completed by young person:

**Please
initial
box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet provided for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions or know who to contact if I have any questions.
2. I understand that my taking part is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
3. I understand the interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder.
4. I understand that my information will be treated confidentially and I will remain anonymous (i.e. I will not be able to be identified by the information used) as far as is possible.
5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.
6. I am happy to participate in the study.

Please sign where indicated below:

Name (young person):

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix J: Information sheet and consent form for parents/carers



Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research project which aims to explore the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting young people and their learning. The research is being carried out as part of my training for the Doctorate in Educational & Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything which is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this. If you agree to give your consent to participate, please sign and initial where appropriate and return to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Who will conduct the research?

My name is Jenny Templeton and I am a Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist undertaking the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. As part of my training I am required to undertake a piece of research with the purpose of contributing to the literature around supporting young people. The research will be written up as a thesis.

Title of the research

'Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school'.

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of the research is to explore Innovate and how effective it is in supporting young people and their learning. The study will take place this school year, 2012-2013.

The study will focus on the virtual learning environment created by Innovate as an alternative way to deliver learning to young people experiencing challenges to attending school. The study will seek the views of key people involved including young people, parents/carers, school staff/key person for education and Innovate staff in exploring its effectiveness.

Why has my son/daughter been invited to participate?

Your child has been asked to take part in this research because they have been invited by their school or Local Authority to carry out some of their learning with Innovate. The views and opinions of parents/carers and young people are of great value in completing the research. Three other young people and their parents/carers will also be asked to participate in the research.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you agree to take part in the study you will be asked to take part in a telephone interview which will be audio-recorded and will last no longer than 1 hour. There are approximately 8

questions which are designed to obtain your views around Innovate and how it supports your child and their learning.

Your child will also be invited to take part in a telephone interview which will be audio-recorded and will last 30 minutes. The interview has approximately 10 questions which are designed to seek their views on using Innovate as a way of learning away from school and how they feel it supports them and their education. Should your child wish to continue talking about their experience with Innovate after 30 minutes, a second interview, lasting no longer than 30 minutes, may be arranged with you and your child. The interviews with you and your child will be carried out separately, and will be arranged with you, for a time which is mutually convenient for you as a family and the researcher.

In addition, the researcher will have access to information about your child provided by Innovate, including their attendance, progress and engagement with Innovate. All information will remain confidential and will be anonymised. Following completion of the study, the information will be destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

All information and results collected will be made anonymous and used in exploring the effectiveness of Innovate, which will then be written up as a thesis. The results of the research will also be shared with Innovate.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All personal information and details will remain confidential and will be anonymised. Following the study, all sensitive information will be destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act. The research will be carried out within The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Health Professions Council's Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. The research has received ethical approval by The University of Manchester Research and Ethics Committee.

What happens if my child and I decide not to take part or if we change our minds?

It is entirely up to you and your child to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to participate you should keep this information sheet and you will be asked to sign the attached consent form and return it to me within 2 weeks using the envelope provided. If you decided to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to you or your child. Please note that choosing to take part or not take part in the study will have no impact on your child's marks, assessments or future studies.

What are some of the possible benefits of taking part?

Some of the benefits of taking part in the study include the opportunity for you and your child to express your views about Innovate and how it could be developed further.

Where will the research be conducted?

The research will be conducted via the telephone, at a time mutually agreed by you as a family and the researcher.

Contact for further information

Should you wish to discuss anything further, or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the addresses below.

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
Educational Support and Inclusion
Psychology
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number (work): 01397 707 350
Email address:
jenny.templeton@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Professor Kevin Woods
Programme Director
Doctorate in Educational & Child
Educational Support and Inclusion
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number: 0161 275 3511

What if something goes wrong?

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

If you are happy with the above information and consent to participate, please read, initial and sign the attached consent form and return it in the SAE provided. If your child is aged 16 years or over, they are able to give their own consent.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to working with you.

Yours Sincerely,



Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
The University of Manchester

Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign and initial the consent form below.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| | Please
initial
box |
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and know who to contact if I have any questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. As their parent/guardian, I understand that my participation and my child's participation are voluntary and that either of us are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself or my child. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand the interviews will be audio-recorded. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I understand that my information will be treated confidentially and I will remain anonymous as far as is possible. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I am happy for my child to participate in this study (please initial if your child is under 16 years of age and you are happy for them to participate). | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I am happy to participate in this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please sign where indicated below:

Name of parent/guardian: _____ Date: _____ Signature: _____

Name of researcher: _____ Date: _____ Signature: _____

Appendix K: Information sheet and consent form for Innovate teaching staff



Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research project which aims to explore the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting young people and their learning. The research is being carried out as part of my training for the Doctorate in Educational & Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything which is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this. If you agree to give your consent to participate, please sign and initial where appropriate and return to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Who will conduct the research?

My name is Jenny Templeton and I am a Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist undertaking the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. As part of my training I am required to undertake a piece of research with the purpose of contributing to the literature around supporting young people. The research will be written up as a thesis.

Title of the research

‘Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school’.

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of the research is to explore Innovate and how effective it is in supporting young people and their learning. The study will take place throughout this school year (2012-2013).

The study will focus on the virtual learning environment created by Innovate as an alternative way to deliver learning to young people experiencing challenges to attending school. The study will seek the views of key people involved including young people, parents/carers, school staff/key person for education and Innovate staff in exploring its effectiveness.

Why have I been chosen?

Four young people have been selected to participate. You have been chosen because one of the young people participating has identified you as a teacher who they would be happy for me to talk to.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in an audio-recorded interview which will last no longer than 1 hour. There are approximately 8 questions which are designed to obtain your views around Innovate and how it supports young people and their

learning. The interview will be arranged with you for a time which is mutually convenient for you and me.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

All information and results collected will be made anonymous and used in exploring the effectiveness of Innovate, which will then be written up as a thesis. The results of the research will be shared with the Innovate management team.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All personal information and details will remain confidential and will be anonymised. Following the study, all sensitive information will be destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act. The research will be carried out within The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Health Professions Council's Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. The research has received ethical approval by The University of Manchester Research and Ethics Committee.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part, it is entirely voluntary. You can keep this information sheet and will be asked to sign the enclosed consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time or choose not to answer certain questions without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Where will the research be conducted?

The research will be conducted at your place of work or other mutually agreed location if more convenient.

Contacts for further information

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
Educational Support and Inclusion
Psychology
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number (work): 01397 707 350
Email address:
jenny.templeton@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Professor Kevin Woods
Programme Director
Doctorate in Educational & Child
Educational Support and Inclusion
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number: 0161 275 3511

What if something goes wrong?

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to working with you.

Yours Sincerely,

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
The University of Manchester

Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below:

**Please
initial
box**

- I confirm that I have read and understood the attached information sheet on the above project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and know who to contact if I have any questions.
- I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself.
- I understand the interview will be audio-recorded.
- I understand that my information will be treated confidentially and I will remain anonymous as far as is possible.
- I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

I agree to take part in the above project.

Name and occupation:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix L: Information sheet and consent form for Innovate Customer



Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research project which aims to explore the effectiveness of Innovate in supporting young people and their learning. The research is being carried out as part of my training for the Doctorate in Educational & Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything which is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this. If you agree to give your consent to participate, please sign and initial where appropriate and return to me in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Who will conduct the research?

My name is Jenny Templeton and I am a Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist undertaking the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Manchester. As part of my training I am required to undertake a piece of research with the purpose of contributing to the literature around supporting young people. The research will be written up as a thesis.

Title of the research

'Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school'.

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of the research is to explore Innovate and how effective it is in supporting young people and their learning. The study will take place throughout this school year (2012-2013).

The study will focus on the virtual learning environment created by Innovate as an alternative way to deliver learning to young people experiencing challenges to attending school. The study will seek the views of key people involved including young people, parents/carers, Innovate customer/key person for education and Innovate staff in exploring its effectiveness.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have been identified by Innovate as a key person who has been involved with a young person/young people who use Innovate to support their learning.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in an audio-recorded telephone interview which will last no longer than 45 minutes. There are approximately 8 questions which are designed to obtain your views around Innovate and how it supports young people and their learning. The interview will be arranged with you for a time which is mutually convenient for you and me.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

All information and results collected will be made anonymous and used in exploring the effectiveness of Innovate, which will then be written up as a thesis. The results of the research will be shared with the Innovate management team.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All personal information and details will remain confidential and will be anonymised. Following the study, all sensitive information will be destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act. The research will be carried out within The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Health Professions Council's Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. The research has received ethical approval by The University of Manchester Research and Ethics Committee.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part, it is entirely voluntary. You can keep this information sheet and will be asked to sign the enclosed consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time or choose not to answer certain questions without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Where will the research be conducted?

The research will be conducted by telephone, or mutually agreed location if more convenient.

Contacts for further information

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
Educational Support and Inclusion
Psychology
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number (work): 01397 707 350
Email address:
jenny.templeton@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Professor Kevin Woods
Programme Director
Doctorate in Educational & Child
Educational Support and Inclusion
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Telephone number: 0161 275 3511

What if something goes wrong?

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to working with you.

Yours Sincerely,

Jenny Templeton.

Jenny Templeton
Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist
The University of Manchester

Exploring virtual learning as an alternative provision to support young people experiencing challenges to attending school

CONSENT FORM

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**Please
initial
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- I understand the interview will be audio-recorded.
- I understand that my information will be treated confidentially and I will remain anonymous as far as is possible.
- I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

I agree to take part in the above project.

Name and occupation:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

**Appendix M: Email confirming ethical approval from the University of Manchester
Research Ethics Committee (UREC)**

The University
of Manchester

MANCHESTER
1824

**Secretary to Research Ethics Committees
Room 2.004 John Owens Building**

Tel: 0161 275 2206/2046
Fax: 0161 275 5697
Email: timothy.stibbs@manchester.ac.uk

Ref: ethics/11407

Compliance and Risk Office
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Prof. Kevin Woods,
School of Education,
A5.16 Ellen Wilkinson Building.

20th March 2012

Dear Prof. Woods,

Research Ethics Committee 4

*[Templeton, Woods: Exploring virtual learning to support young people absent from school
(ref 11407)]*

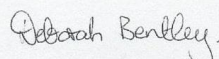
I write to thank Prof. Woods for coming to meet the Committee on 7th March 2012 and to confirm that it gave the above research project, after the submission of amendments / clarifications, a favourable ethical opinion.

This approval is effective for a period of five years and if the project continues beyond that period it must be submitted for review. It is the Committee's practice to warn investigators that they should not depart from the agreed protocol without seeking the approval of the Committee, as any significant deviation could invalidate the insurance arrangements and constitute research misconduct. We also ask that any information sheet should carry a University logo or other indication of where it came from, and that, in accordance with University policy, any data carrying personal identifiers must be encrypted when not held on a university computer or kept as a hard copy in a location which is accessible only to those involved with the research.

Finally, I would be grateful if you could complete and return the attached form at the end of the project or by the end of February 2013.

We hope the research goes well.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Deborah Bentley
Secretary to University Research Ethics Committee 4