How are young people attending a special school included in decision-making towards post-16 provision in the annual review process?

Shaquille Cole
Registration Number: 100360627

Doctorate in Educational Psychology (EdPsyD)
University of East Anglia
The School of Education and Lifelong Learning
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Abstract

In England, there is a statutory requirement for children and young people (CYP) with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to have an Annual Review Meeting (ARM) each year. These meetings review progress and update the EHCP to reflect the current profile of strengths, needs, aspirations, and provision. For CYP in Year 9 and above, ARMs also incorporate transition planning for post-16 education, training, or employment. ARMs typically involve CYP, parents or carers, school staff, and representatives from the local authority. However, existing literature suggests that CYP's voices are often underrepresented in these meetings. While some CYP attend, they may not play an active role in decision-making; others do not attend at all, leaving parents or staff to make post-16 decisions on their behalf. Furthermore, most studies examining ARMs focus on mainstream settings rather than special schools.

This research addresses that gap by exploring how Young People's (YP's) views are included in ARMs within a special school context. A qualitative case study design was used to examine three ARMs at one special school. Eight participants took part, comprising three YP, their parents or carers, and school staff. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to gather their perspectives on the ARM process. Data were analysed thematically to identify common patterns across accounts. Two overarching themes emerged: 'Ambiguity and uncertainty' surrounding ARMs, and 'Communication,' which included subthemes such as 'Local authority involvement' and 'Eliciting the views of YP.'

Findings indicated that schools employed a range of strategies to gather YP's views, including collecting their perspectives over time and using 'Personal Profiles' to inform key decisions, such as whether they wished to remain in school or pursue employment after graduation. Both school staff and parents highlighted that limited local authority attendance contributed to the perception of ARMs as an 'informal' process, particularly where the local authority prioritised Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings over ARMs for YP in care.

The study has implications for Educational Psychology practice, particularly in promoting consistent local authority involvement and supporting the ongoing elicitation of YP's views to ensure their voices are meaningfully represented in decision-making.

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Chapter 1-Literature Review

Introduction

A literature review was undertaken to explore how Children and Young People's (CYP's) views are elicited during their Annual Review Meetings (ARMs) and the extent to which these views influence decision-making. ARMs are statutory yearly meetings held to monitor the progress of CYP with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). For Young People (YP) in Year 9, ARMs must include discussions relating to their transition to adulthood, guided by the Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) framework. This includes consideration of Education/Employment, Community Inclusion, Independent Living Skills, and Health and Wellbeing. ARMs also involve decisions about whether YP should remain in their current educational setting. Central to this process is the requirement for school staff to elicit CYP's views to inform decision-making.

A literature review is essential in this area because, although CYP's views are routinely gathered for ARMs, evidence suggests that their presence in meetings does not always translate into meaningful influence (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020). This has important implications for YP, as limited incorporation of their views may affect the quality of their transition planning and their post-16 education or employment outcomes. Furthermore, eliciting CYP's views is a core expectation within the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015), making it necessary to examine how national guidelines are enacted within statutory processes such as ARMs.

The review begins with an overview of the researcher's literature review methodology. It then discusses the concept of 'pupil voice' and traces the evolution of key legislation relating to child advocacy at both national and international levels. Following this, the review examines selected literature on practices that contribute to information gathering for ARMs, including person-centred meetings, methods for eliciting CYP's views, decision-making processes in meetings, and existing research on ARMs.

This review also holds particular relevance for Educational Psychologists (EPs). In practice, EPs are required to elicit the views of CYP with special educational needs as part of Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) when producing Psychological Advice reports (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015). EPs may also involve CYP in person-centred planning meetings, such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATHs), particularly when supporting transitions to post-16 education or adulthood. Additionally, EPs are

often invited to statutory meetings such as ARMs to review EHCPs and, where necessary, contribute to reassessments, which may involve gathering updated views from CYP.

A key model underpinning this thesis is Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of Children's Participation'. Alternative frameworks, including Shier's (2001) 'Pathways to Participation' and Lundy's (2007) 'Model of Participation', were considered as both build on Hart's (1992) original work. Shier's (2001) model is particularly valuable for examining organisational decision-making structures, and his later study in a rural coffee-growing community (Shier, 2010) demonstrated how participation can shift from tokenistic involvement towards enabling CYP to exercise a more meaningful voice. Lundy's (2007) model offers a rights-based interpretation of participation, with links to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In particular, Article 12—children's right to express their views and have them taken seriously—through four components: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence.

Hart's (1992) model was selected for this thesis because it focuses explicitly on CYP's involvement in decision-making, ranging from non-participation (for example, adults making decisions on behalf of CYP) to full participation, where CYP and adults collaborate in shared decision-making. This is directly relevant to the EHCNA process, in which eliciting the views of CYP is a statutory requirement, and to ARMs, which aim to ensure that CYP are actively engaged in reviewing their EHCPs, particularly during key transition points, for example transition to adulthood if they are in Year 9 and above.

Hart's (1992) model is also useful for identifying power dynamics within participation, including those between parents or carers, school staff and CYP. This is a focal point to the present thesis, which examines how YP participate in ARMs and how CYP have been involved in decision-making across national and international contexts. A further strength of Hart's (1992) model is its capacity to highlight tokenism. For example, Funk et al. (2022) used Hart's (1992) ladder as an analytical framework to assess the level of youth participation in a participatory research project, demonstrating its utility for evaluating the authenticity of CYP's involvement.

Finally, Hart's (1992) model provides a practical tool for evaluating current practice, particularly in identifying where CYP's participation may be limited or superficial. This is especially important to ARMs, where participation can vary considerably, in particular for CYP with special educational needs (SEN) (including communication and interaction difficulties), who may face additional barriers to expressing their views.

1.0 Pupil Voice

Pupil Voice can be understood as both a systemic (school-wide) and individual commitment to listening to the views of CYP (Allen, Milne, Velija & Radley, 2024). Within school contexts, the term typically refers to the ways in which CYP are supported to communicate with staff about their experiences in education, with the aim of contributing to change or improvement, including aspects of teaching and learning (Flores & Ahn, 2024).

The role of pupil engagement in educational decision-making has shifted from passive to more active participation, influenced by legislation such as the Children and Families Act (2014), which places increased emphasis on advocacy for CYP. This includes CYP being invited to, and asked to contribute to, decisions that affect them in meetings such as Annual Review Meetings (ARMs) (Palikara, 2020). Earlier interpretations of Pupil Voice can be traced to Lodge's (2005) concept of 'passive pupil participation'. Lodge (2005) found that Pupil Voice was often limited to consultation for quality assurance purposes—such as during school inspections—or used as a mechanism for school improvement. In this context, pupils were sometimes positioned as 'Expert Witnesses' to their own learning experiences, contributing insights but not influencing final decisions.

Despite pupils offering their views, decision-making ultimately remained with adults and school staff. This suggests that Pupil Voice in such contexts functioned primarily as an information-gathering exercise rather than as a genuine partnership in decision-making. Consequently, this interpretation may be viewed as tokenistic (Hart, 1992), rather than reflecting co-production between CYP and adults (Boswell & Woods, 2021). More recent legislative developments, such as the Children and Families Act (2014), have sought to promote more active participation, encouraging a shift towards co-production. This has been accompanied by increased efforts to enhance Pupil Voice through group-based approaches, such as school parliaments or councils, which enable staff to gather collective views from cohorts of pupils (Jones & Bubb, 2020).

1.1. Pupil Voice in National and International Contexts

In England, the concept of Pupil Voice has become increasingly embedded within educational policy and practice over the past two decades. Legislative frameworks such as the Children Act (1989), the Children and Families Act (2014), and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015) have progressively strengthened CYP's rights to express their views and be involved in decisions affecting their education. These frameworks

emphasise participation, co-production, and person-centred planning, positioning CYP as active contributors rather than passive recipients of support. When viewed through Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, these policy developments reflect an aspiration to move practice beyond the lower levels of non-participation towards more collaborative forms of shared decision-making.

National guidance has also encouraged schools to adopt structured approaches for gathering Pupil Voice, including school councils, pupil surveys, and consultation groups (Jones & Bubb, 2020). Research suggests that such approaches can enhance school improvement, promote engagement, and strengthen relationships between pupils and staff (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). However, the extent to which these structures increase CYP's participation up to higher levels within Hart's (1992) ladder of participation varies considerably.

Studies have found that while many schools routinely collect pupils' views, these views do not always translate into meaningful change, raising concerns that practice often remains at the level of tokenism—levels three and four of Hart's model—rather than progressing towards genuine partnership (Lodge, 2005; Hart, 1992). Within the SEND system specifically, Pupil Voice is a statutory requirement during processes such as EHCNAs and ARMs. Yet evidence indicates that CYP with SEND often experience limited influence, with adults retaining control over key decisions (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020). This highlights a persistent gap between policy expectations and practice, particularly for CYP with communication and interaction needs, whose participation may be constrained by structural and communicative barriers.

Internationally, Pupil Voice is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), particularly Article 12, which states that children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight. Related to Hart's (1992) model, Article 12 provides a rights-based mandate for participation that aligns with the upper levels of the ladder, where CYP are actively involved in decision-making processes. Within the United Kingdom, Scotland's "Getting It Right For Every Child" (GIRFEC) framework places strong emphasis on children's participation in planning and decision-making.

Research indicates that Scottish schools have increasingly adopted child-centred approaches, though challenges remain in ensuring consistent implementation across settings (Tisdall, 2017). Similarly, in Wales, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms have strengthened CYP's rights to participate in planning their support. Studies suggest that Welsh schools are moving towards more collaborative models of decision-making, though variability persists across local authorities (Evans, 2021).

Across European contexts, Pupil Voice initiatives have been closely linked to education and school improvement. Lundy's (2007) model has been widely adopted across Europe as a framework for evaluating the authenticity of children's participation. It complements Hart's (1992) ladder by offering a rights-based structure that helps clarify what is required for CYP to move beyond tokenistic involvement and towards meaningful influence in decision-making. In Sweden, participation is a long-standing educational principle, and schools are required to involve pupils in planning, assessment, and school development.

However, research by Thornberg (2010) suggests that while Swedish pupils frequently express their views, adults still retain the majority of decision-making power, echoing concerns about tokenism found in England and reflecting Hart's (1992) mid-level stages where CYP are consulted but lack influence. This pattern is also evident in Finland, where student participation is embedded in the Basic Education Act (Finlex Data Bank, 1998), yet pupils' actual influence continues to vary between schools (Törrönen, 2012). Research across Central and Eastern Europe similarly indicates that while schools increasingly recognise the importance of Pupil Voice, traditional teacher-centred approaches can limit opportunities for genuine participation (Kovač Šebart & Krek, 2015), again aligning with Hart's (1992) argument that cultural norms and power dynamics shape the degree of participation achievable in practice.

Collectively, European research highlights a shared commitment to children's rights and participation, but also a gap between policy aspirations and everyday practice. While structures such as student councils, teaching approaches, and legal entitlements exist, the degree to which CYP's views influence decisions often depend on school culture, teacher attitudes, and systemic priorities. Related to Hart's (1992) model, these findings suggest that many systems remain situated on the lower or middle levels of participation, where CYP are listened to but have limited influence.

2.0. Legislation

Throughout history, there have been changes in legislation regarding CYP with and without SEN and the opportunities available for them to advocate their views. Key legislation selected for this review were those that explicitly referenced child advocacy as a focal point or highlighted the importance of CYP being provided with opportunities to voice their views for decisions that impact them.

2.1 International Legislation

Internationally, a series of landmark developments have shaped the evolution of child self-advocacy, support and safety within educational contexts. The first significant recognition of children's rights emerged with the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924), widely regarded as the first international human rights instrument to explicitly address children's needs. This declaration outlined fundamental principles, including children's rights to care, protection from exploitation, support for healthy development and the opportunity to secure a livelihood.

This early framework was later reinforced by broader human rights instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) included Article 25, which emphasised the provision of special care and assistance during childhood. Similarly, the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) established Article 2, which enshrined the right to education, ensuring that children could not be denied access to schooling. Collectively, these international milestones laid the foundation for contemporary approaches to children's rights, embedding principles of protection, inclusion and participation within education systems worldwide.

Building on these earlier frameworks, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)—developed by UNICEF and adopted in 1989—became the most comprehensive and influential international agreement on children's rights. The UNCRC consists of 54 Articles that signatory nations are required to uphold, ensuring that CYP are protected, supported and provided with opportunities to express their views (UNICEF, 2023). A central principle of the UNCRC is that decisions made by adults must be in the best interests of the child, including decisions about their education, care and daily support.

Within the context of child advocacy, Article 12 is particularly significant. It states that children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views taken seriously. Importantly, the UNCRC emphasises that CYP must be supported to share their views in ways that are accessible and appropriate to their evolving capacities—that is, their developing ability to make reasoned decisions about their lives. This principle underpins contemporary expectations that CYP should be meaningfully involved in educational decision-making, including processes such as ARMs and EHCNAs.

2.2 National Legislation

In England, the Children Act (1989) provided a foundational framework for supporting CYP who are looked after. It placed a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote children's welfare and introduced the role of Advocates, whose primary purpose is to support CYP's views and work in partnership with them independently of the local authority. The Act also established early statutory expectations around child advocacy, giving CYP the right to raise complaints about their care arrangements. For example, Section 24 states that when a child is looked after, the local authority must "advise, assist and befriend" them to promote their welfare when they cease to be looked after (Children Act, 1989). This included enabling CYP to attend meetings about their care and communicate concerns directly to social workers if they were dissatisfied with their placement. The Adoption and Children Act (2002) later strengthened these provisions by requiring local authorities to support looked-after CYP who wish to make a complaint, thereby reinforcing their right to self-advocate. Where CYP are unable to advocate independently, Section 26A requires local authorities to provide assistance, ensuring that CYP's voices are represented even when they cannot express their views unaided.

Alongside developments in social care, significant legislative changes have also taken place within the SEND system to ensure that processes are more inclusive of CYP's views. Dissatisfaction from parents and schools regarding the previous Statement of Special Educational Needs system—particularly concerns that the process was fragmented, insufficiently collaborative and not centred around the child—prompted reform (Runswick-Cole, 2008). In response, the Children and Families Act (2014) was introduced as a comprehensive, 10-part Act designed to protect vulnerable CYP and improve support for those with SEN. Part 3 of the Act emphasises participation, stating that local authorities must support CYP and their parents/carers to be involved in decisions about education, care and support, with the aim of helping CYP achieve the best possible outcomes.

The SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015) provides statutory guidance for settings working with CYP with SEN. It established that CYP and their families are entitled to express preferences and have greater control over decisions affecting them. Section 1.9 states that local authorities must ensure that CYP and parents are provided with the information, advice and support necessary to participate meaningfully in discussions and decisions about their provision. The SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015) also outlines the statutory process for requesting an EHCNA, which may lead to an EHCP—a legally binding document specifying the support a CYP must

receive. EHCPs must be reviewed annually to ensure that needs, provision and outcomes remain appropriate.

Notably, Section 4.32 of the SEND Code of Practice highlights the need to ensure that disabled CYP and those with SEN can access appropriate facilities, including ancillary aids, assistive technology and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). This reinforces the expectation that CYP should be supported to express their views using communication methods suited to their needs (Leatherman & Wegner, 2021).

Together, the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015) have driven a systemic shift towards person-centred planning (Corrigan, 2014). At a systemic level, this includes stronger expectations for collaboration between agencies such as social care, health services and EPs (SEND Code of Practice, 2015, Section 3.39). At an individual level, it places CYP at the centre of planning and decision-making. This may involve EPs eliciting CYP's views during EHCNAs (Vivash & Morgan, 2019) to build a holistic understanding of their strengths and needs, or CYP participating in co-production meetings with parents/carers and school staff (Boswell & Woods, 2021). Research suggests that these reforms have, in some cases, enabled CYP to influence key decisions—such as transitions within mainstream education—by being supported to advocate for themselves (Corrigan, 2014).

3.0. Literature Review Methodology

The literature review will begin with a broad overview of research relating to the concept of 'Pupil Voice'. It will then outline the evolution of key legislation—both internationally and nationally—concerning child advocacy and the involvement of stakeholders (parents/carers and school staff) in decision-making, from the Children Act (1989) through to the Children and Families Act (2014). Following this, the review will examine literature relating to specific components of Annual Review Meetings (Ganoa, Palikara & Castro, 2018), including:

- Person-centred Meetings (Palikara, 2020)
- Eliciting the views of children and young people (Jones & Bubb (2020)
- The role of choice and young people during transitional periods (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2008; Ganoa, Palikara & Castro, 2018)
- Annual Review Meetings (Ganoa, Palikara & Castro, 2018)

This will then lead to a summary of the literature to identify key gaps and establish the extent to which CYP have been able to participate in, and influence, decision-making within the studies reviewed.

3.1 Narrative Literature Review

A narrative literature review (Sukehera, 2022) was selected to explore the current research and legislation related to Annual Review Meetings (ARMs) (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020). This approach was chosen because of its flexibility, which enables the researcher to examine a broad range of interconnected topics within a given area (Sukehera, 2022). This is particularly relevant for the present investigation, as the annual review process is wide in scope: it encompasses eliciting the views of CYP (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020), facilitating person-centred meetings involving multiple stakeholders (parents/carers, local authority representatives and school staff), and reviewing the progress of a child or young person (Palikara, 2020). A narrative review therefore allows the researcher to generate a comprehensive overview of literature relating to each component of ARMs and to identify the level of participation experienced by CYP across selected studies.

In addition, adopting a narrative literature review has enabled the researcher to explore whether adults, school staff/professionals or CYP themselves are positioned as the primary decision-makers within the ARM process (Palikara, 2020). This broader perspective is essential for understanding how CYP's views are elicited, represented and acted upon within statutory meetings. In contrast, if the focus of the investigation were limited to a specific element of ARMs—such as eliciting CYP's views (Flores & Ahn, 2021) a systematic literature review may have been appropriate (Owens, 2021). However, this approach would not provide the breadth or holistic insight needed to capture the full scope of the annual review process (Sukehera, 2020). Consequently, a narrative literature review was judged to be the most appropriate methodology for addressing the aims of this study.

3.2 Literature Search Method

A literature search was conducted between January 2024 and September 2024 using the ERIC, Scopus and EBSCOhost databases. Initial exploratory searches used broad terms such as 'Annual Review Meeting', 'Young People', 'Elicit Views', 'Pupil Voice', 'Education Health Care Plan', 'Transition', 'Post-16', 'Education', and 'Employment'. Across the databases, the initial search findings were as follows:

- **ERIC** – ‘Annual review meeting’ ‘Young People’, ‘Post-16’ ‘Transition’ ‘Education or Employment’: *54 results since 2015*
- **EBSCOhost** – ‘Annual review meeting’ ‘Young People’, ‘Post-16’ ‘transition’ ‘Education or Employment’: *569,052 results since 2015*
- **Scopus** – ‘Annual review meeting’ ‘Young people’, ‘Post-16’ ‘Transition’ ‘Education or Employment’: *97 results since 2015*

Although these broad terms were useful for exploring the scope of existing literature, several—such as ‘student voice’, ‘learner voice’, ‘pupil voice’, ‘Education, Health and Care Plan’, and ‘eliciting views’—either produced very few relevant results or returned an excessively wide range of unrelated material. As a result, these terms were not used in the subsequent, more focused searches for this review. Literature on ‘Pupil Voice’ was used to inform the sections examining national and international contexts, as outlined earlier in this paper.

To stay aligned with the aims of the review, the search strategy was refined by identifying terms specific to each stage of the ARM process. This allowed for a more targeted and systematic search for literature directly relevant to ARMs, as outlined in the overview.

The researcher undertook further searches across the ERIC, Scopus and EBSCO databases to locate relevant literature on the following topics:

- *Annual Review Meetings children and young people and post-16*
- *Child-centred meetings*
- *Person-Centred Meetings*
- *Eliciting the Views of Children and Young People*
- *Decision-making for children and young people.*

The researcher selected literature published from 2014 onwards to ensure alignment with the changes in expectations surrounding the inclusion of CYP’s voices introduced by the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (Department for Health and Education, 2015). Focusing on post-2014 studies enables attention to current practice in CYP advocacy and their participation within educational decision-making. International studies, both pre- and post-2014, were also included to provide broader contextual insight into how child advocacy approaches have been implemented in school settings.

4.0. Tools for collecting the voices of Children and Young People Related to their experiences and methods of communication

The studies outlined were selected to provide an example of the application of tools used to gain pupil views within different contexts in England. This is due to them describing a particular tool that have been used to elicit the views of CYP with/without communication and interaction needs and for EHCNA's.

4.1. Tools used by Educational Psychologists to Collect Pupil Views for Education Health Care Needs Assessments

Within school contexts, 'Pupil Voice' is often gathered through individual discussions between CYP and an adult, including during statutory EHCNAs. During these assessments, professionals such as EPs are required to elicit CYP's views as part of their Psychological Advice report (Vivash & Morgan, 2019). As with ARMs, gathering CYP's views during EHCNAs is a mandatory requirement (Department for Health and Education, 2015).

EPs draw on a range of tools to support this process. One commonly used approach is Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), including tools such as the Ideal School (Moran, 2001). This drawing-based technique invites CYP to describe an environment they would not want to attend and their 'ideal' environment, thereby revealing their personal constructs and preferences. Loureiro, Grecu, de Moll and Hadjar (2019) found that such techniques help staff gain insight into CYP's wellbeing and provide practical guidance on how best to support them in school.
EPs also use questionnaires, informal conversations (Williamson, 2022) and psychological assessments to explore CYP's perspectives. Self-report measures such as the Beck Youth Inventory can help CYP communicate their experiences and self-concept, including how they perceive themselves in relation to school-based challenges such as reading difficulties (Lindeblad, Svensson & Gustafson, 2016).

In addition, tools such as Children's Exploratory Drawings (Timney & Cohman, 2020) allow CYP to express how they think about their school experiences and their place within their community. These visual resources can be particularly effective for CYP with communication and interaction needs, as the structured drawings depicting common school scenarios may support them in identifying and selecting images that reflect their own experiences. The use of such tools can significantly enhance the quality and inclusivity of educational processes. First, they help ensure that CYP's perspectives are accurately represented in key documents, including the Psychological

Advice report for EHCNAs. This aligns with quality assurance expectations for the EHCNA process, which emphasise that CYP's voices must be central to decision-making. Second, accessible tools can help CYP feel genuinely included in the assessment process. When CYP experience their views being heard and valued, this can foster a sense of ownership and collaboration, contributing to more positive outcomes.

In relation to Hart's (1992) model, the use of effective elicitation tools can support movement towards the 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults' stage, where CYP's lived experiences and preferences meaningfully shape planning and provision. Thus, eliciting CYP's views is not merely a procedural requirement but a practice that strengthens authenticity, participation and the effectiveness of educational support. However, the extent to which this is achieved can vary depending on factors such as CYP's age, the severity of SEN, and the quality of their relationships with adults. These factors can act as barriers to accurately eliciting CYP's views, highlighting the need for flexible, sensitive and developmentally appropriate approaches.

Overall, the literature on eliciting CYP's views during EHCNAs demonstrates that while a range of tools—such as PCP-based approaches, self-report questionnaires and exploratory drawings—can enhance participation, their effectiveness depends on how sensitively and appropriately they are used. These tools offer valuable opportunities for CYP to communicate their experiences in accessible ways, particularly for those with communication and interaction needs (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Rabiee, 2013). When applied, they can support movement towards the higher levels of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, where CYP's perspectives meaningfully shape decision-making and contribute to shared planning with adults (Lundy, 2007; Tisdall, 2017).

However, the literature also makes clear that the quality of CYP's participation is not guaranteed simply by using these tools. Factors such as CYP's age, SEN profile, emotional wellbeing and their relationship with the adult eliciting their views can all influence the accuracy, depth and authenticity of the information gathered (Lewis, 2010; Porter et al., 2021). Such barriers could restrict CYP's ability to express their views freely, keeping participation closer to the lower levels of Hart's model, where adults retain greater control over interpretation and decision-making (Woolfson et al., 2010).

Taken together, this highlights that eliciting CYP's views is both a statutory requirement and a relational practice. Tools can facilitate participation, but meaningful involvement ultimately depends on the skill, sensitivity and contextual awareness of the professionals using them (Bunning et al., 2017; Kirby, 2020). This reinforces the need for thoughtful, flexible approaches

that prioritise CYP's agency and ensure their voices genuinely inform assessment and planning processes (Taylor & Wright, 2022).

4.2. Collecting Pupil Views for Children and Young People with Communication and Interaction Needs

In England, speech and language needs—categorised under Communication and Interaction—have been identified as the most prevalent type of SEN (Office for National Statistics, 2024). These needs can significantly affect the ability of school staff and practitioners to elicit the views of CYP with communication difficulties. As a result, alternative tools and methods have been developed to support CYP in expressing their perspectives. Approaches such as drawing (MacGregor, Currie & Wetton, 1998), visual communication systems including the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) have become increasingly valuable in eliciting CYP's views (Leatherman & Wegner, 2021; Pearlman & Michaels, 2019). This development aligns with the Children and Families Act (2014), which states that CYP with SEN should have access to additional resources, where necessary, to support them in expressing their views.

This emphasis is reflected in the research literature. Murphy and Cameron (2008), for example, found that visual communication tools such as Talking Mats were more effective in enabling participants with intellectual disabilities to communicate and express their views than their primary communication methods (speech, signing or Makaton). Participants reported that Talking Mats provided structure to conversations, which increased CYP's engagement and enhanced their ability to express their views.

The literature demonstrates that the use of alternative communication tools—such as drawing, PECS, AAC and Talking Mats—can play a key role in enabling CYP with communication and interaction needs to express their views. These tools help bridge the gap created by speech, language and communication difficulties, ensuring that CYP's perspectives are not overlooked simply because they cannot communicate through conventional means (Rabiee, 2013; Bunning et al., 2017). Research consistently shows that visual and AAC-based methods can support CYP to share preferences, emotions and experiences in ways that feel more accessible than spoken language alone (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Cameron & Murphy, 2007). In doing so, they support more equitable participation and align with the legislative expectation that CYP with SEN should have access to additional resources to help them express their views (Children and Families Act, 2014).

When considered through Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, these tools have the potential to move CYP beyond the lower levels—where participation is limited or adult-directed—towards more meaningful involvement. By providing structure, reducing cognitive and language demands, and enabling CYP to communicate in ways that feel authentic and manageable, tools such as Talking Mats can facilitate shared decision-making and enhance CYP's agency within assessment and planning processes (Murphy & Cameron, 2008; Lundy, 2007). Such approaches align with broader participation frameworks that emphasise the importance of accessible communication environments in enabling CYP to influence decisions that affect them (Tisdall, 2017).

4.0 Person-Centred Approaches

Changes introduced through the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015) have placed increased emphasis on person-centred meetings as a means of promoting CYP's voice. Within educational settings, person-centred meetings take a variety of forms, ranging from routine events such as parents' evenings (Morgan, 2011) to Individualised Education Plan meetings for CYP with special educational needs (Anderson & Keys, 2019), consultation meetings (Williamson, 2022) and Annual Review Meetings (ARMs) for CYP with EHCPs (Palikara, 2020). These meetings serve different functions but share a common aim: to ensure that CYP's views, preferences and aspirations are meaningfully incorporated into planning and decision-making processes.

4.1. Person-Centred Approaches

A person-centred approach positions CYP at the core of planning for decisions that affect them, as emphasised in the Children and Families Act (2014). This includes discussions about how educational settings can best meet their needs and how CYP can be meaningfully involved in shaping their future pathways. A central component of person-centred planning is the elicitation of CYP's views in ways that make them feel valued and respected, particularly during key transition points such as preparing for adulthood (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020).

This approach aligns closely with Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation which highlights 'true participation' as occurring when decision-making is shared between CYP and adults, or when CYP take the lead in shaping decisions. Person-centred planning also emphasises collaboration between CYP, parents/carers and school staff, reflecting a holistic and relational model of decision-making. Within Educational Psychology, this has led to the development of structured

tools designed to facilitate collaborative, strengths-based conversations about a CYP's future, such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) and Making an Action Plan (MAP) (Carpenter, Lee & Male, 2023).

Despite increased emphasis on embedding person-centred approaches within educational settings, the literature identifies several barriers to their consistent implementation. These challenges arise both at the level of the individual CYP—such as communication needs, anxiety or difficulties with abstract reasoning—and at a systemic level, where whole-school practices, staff confidence and organisational priorities may limit the extent to which person-centred planning is fully realised.

4.2. Barriers to Person-Centred Approaches

Person-centred planning can effectively support the inclusion of CYP, the literature identifies several barriers to its implementation. These barriers include internal and external factors such as CYP's mental capacity or capabilities to explain their needs (Huggins, Donnan, Cameron & Williams, 2021), anxiety (Magiati et al., 2015), and communication and interaction difficulties. Several researchers have highlighted that CYP's cognitive abilities and capacity to articulate their needs can limit their meaningful participation in person-centred planning meetings. For some CYP with special educational needs, difficulties related to cognitive processing may restrict their ability to self-advocate.

For example, Huggins et al. (2021) explored the emotional self-awareness of CYP with autism and found that participants often struggled to describe their emotional experiences and had difficulty recognising and identifying their own emotions. These challenges can hinder person-centred approaches, as they affect CYP's ability to independently express their needs, which in turn impacts the accuracy and authenticity of their views being represented. Consequently, parents or carers may assume responsibility for decision-making on behalf of CYP. This dynamic is reflected in the Mental Capacity Act (2005), which stipulates that if CYP are under the age of 16, or are deemed to lack capacity, parents are legally entitled to take ownership of decision-making (Murrell & McCalla, 2016).

Further barriers relate to CYP's communication and interaction needs. As noted previously, the Office for National Statistics (2024) reported that speech, language and communication needs are the most prevalent type of SEN among pupils receiving additional support. Research indicates that CYP with speech and language impairments often experience difficulties with social

communication (e.g., Adams, 2012). When considered alongside Hart's (1992) model of participation, this suggests that CYP's level of involvement may be contingent on their level of understanding; CYP with stronger communication skills are more likely to engage in collaborative decision-making with adults.

Anxiety has also been identified as a barrier to CYP's involvement in person-centred meetings. Anxiety may lead to reluctance to attend meetings, particularly when CYP experience comorbid conditions such as separation anxiety or social phobia (Mychailyszyn, Mendez & Kendall, 2019). CYP with ASD may be especially vulnerable to anxiety in these contexts due to a preference for predictability (Nah & Neo, 2023) and difficulty adapting to unexpected change (Rydzewska, 2015). Environments can also further exacerbate anxiety and negatively affect school attendance (Richards & Hadwin, 2011). Within Hart's (1992) participation framework, this suggests that CYP's wellbeing can act as a barrier to authentic participation; anxiety may prevent CYP from engaging, resulting in adults making decisions on their behalf (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2008).

Although the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Education, 2015) provide guidance on facilitating person-centred planning, there is no national or universal training for practitioners. This can lead to inconsistent implementation across schools. Robertson et al. (2007) found that barriers to effective person-centred planning included staff competency, funding constraints and a lack of ongoing support for facilitators. These factors may lead staff to view person-centred practices as a lower priority, particularly when they feel insufficiently trained to apply them. Additionally, differing priorities among school staff can influence participation. Morgan (2011), for example, found that limited pupil participation was linked to staff prioritising curriculum delivery, despite senior leadership teams expressing a desire to promote whole-school consultation.

Collectively, the literature suggests that although person-centred planning aspires to place CYP at the heart of decision-making, a range of cognitive, emotional and systemic barriers can prevent CYP from participating meaningfully. When viewed through Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, these barriers help explain why CYP with SEN often remain on the lower levels of the ladder, where participation is limited, adult-directed or tokenistic.

Internal barriers—such as difficulties with emotional self-awareness (Huggins et al., 2021), challenges with abstract reasoning (Preece & Jordan, 2010) and communication needs (Adams, 2012)—restrict CYP's ability to express their views independently. As a result, adults frequently interpret or speak on behalf of CYP, positioning them within the *"consulted and informed"* or even

“assigned but informed” stages of Hart’s (1992) model. In these cases, CYP may be present in meetings but lack the capacity or confidence to influence decisions, limiting the authenticity of their participation.

Emotional factors such as anxiety further constrain CYP’s involvement. CYP with ASD, for example, may experience heightened anxiety in unfamiliar or socially demanding contexts (Magiati et al., 2015), making it difficult for them to attend or engage in person-centred meetings. Within Hart’s (1992) framework, this means that CYP’s wellbeing becomes a barrier to progressing towards the higher levels of participation, where shared or child-led decision-making occurs. Systemic barriers also play a significant role. Inconsistent training, limited staff confidence and competing school priorities (Robertson et al., 2007; Morgan, 2011) can result in person-centred planning being implemented unevenly across settings. These structural limitations reinforce adult control and reduce opportunities for CYP to meaningfully shape decisions, keeping participation at the lower levels of Hart’s (1992) ladder.

Overall, this highlights that while person-centred planning has the potential to support genuine collaboration, CYP’s position on Hart’s (1992) ladder is heavily influenced by their cognitive and emotional needs, as well as by the systems and professionals surrounding them. Addressing these barriers is essential for enabling CYP to move beyond consultation towards authentic, shared decision-making within person-centred processes.

5.0. Eliciting the Views of Children and Young People in England

International context of the impact of Eliciting the Views of Children and Young People

Few studies in England met the criteria for this literature review, studies in international locations such as the United States and Norway were selected. The initial section of this review will feature studies on children who were primary school-aged before transitioning to secondary school-aged.

The findings indicated that school principals’ motivation for eliciting student voice was shaped by their past and present professional experiences, as well as by their aspiration for pupils to develop a sense of critical consciousness. The study also demonstrated that engaging with pupil voice supported principals in developing as socially just educators and enhanced their leadership capabilities. In this way, student voice provided CYP with opportunities to contribute to staff learning and professional growth. Furthermore, the findings suggested that pupils’ feedback

helped the school to become more inclusive and more receptive to pupil perspectives, embedding responsiveness to CYP within the school's ethos.

The study also showed that pupils were able to participate at a high level alongside adults. Their role could be understood as providing consultation to school staff to inform change within the school setting. This aligns with the 'community initiative, shared decision-making' level of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, in which CYP contribute collectively to decisions that influence their community—in this case, the school at a senior leadership level. Through this process, principals reported becoming more socially aware and demonstrated enhanced leadership skills.

Overall, the investigation suggests that mutually beneficial participation between pupils and school leaders can positively influence school ethos and strengthen leadership practice. The findings highlight the potential for authentic pupil voice to act not only as a tool for improving educational provision but also as an opportunity for professional reflection for staff and organisational change.

Jones and Bubb (2020) explored the use of pupil voice within school councils in mainstream schools in Norway, a context selected for its longstanding emphasis on children's wellbeing and self-advocacy. Their findings indicated that pupil voice was enacted in a relatively rigid manner, as opportunities for participation were largely confined to formal school council structures rather than embedded across a wider range of participatory practices. When pupils' views were elicited, they expected teachers to act upon them and emphasised the importance of collaborative working to ensure that pupil perspectives contributed meaningfully to school improvement.

However, pupils expressed scepticism about working with teachers, noting differences in views about "how school should be." They also voiced hesitation about their peers contributing to school-level decisions, reflecting an awareness of their perceived status as "just kids." Linked to Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, these findings suggest that participation was situated on the lower levels of the ladder—specifically within the "consulted and informed" stage—where pupils are asked for their views but have limited influence over decision-making. The lack of shared decision-making and the absence of structures enabling pupils to collaborate with adults indicate that the school had not progressed towards the higher levels of Hart's (1992) model, such as "adult-initiated, shared decisions with children" or "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults."

This contrasts with Flores and Ahn's (2024) findings, where mutual information-sharing between pupils and school leaders enabled participation to move closer to the upper levels of Hart's (1992) ladder, demonstrating more authentic and collaborative engagement.

In the UK, increasing attention has been given to creative and participatory methods for involving CYP. Giles and Rowley (2020), for example, examined how EPs collaborated with YP to produce a film, representing a form of co-production that aligns more closely with the higher levels in Hart's (1992) ladder such as 'Joint initiative, shared decisions and 'Community's initiative, shared decisions'. In this study, YP acted as co-researchers, directly shaping the content and direction of the film. Their involvement reflects the "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults" level, as the process was genuinely child-directed while still supported by professionals. The completed film prompted reflection among practising EPs and Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs), demonstrating how authentic pupil voice can influence professional practice and contribute to wider community understanding.

Across the literature reviewed, there is evidence of increasing commitment to involving CYP in decision-making. However, there remains an underlying recognition that pupils are positioned as "children" within legal and institutional structures and are often perceived as inexperienced or junior partners in decision-making processes. This dynamic, reflected in Jones and Bubb's (2020) findings, can restrict movement up Hart's (1992) ladder by reinforcing adult decision-making and limiting opportunities for shared decision-making. Nonetheless, the literature also demonstrates that when pupil views are authentically incorporated—particularly when participation approaches the upper levels of Hart's (1992) ladder—they can effectively inform school leadership practice (Jones & Bubb, 2020) and support pupils in developing critical thinking skills that prepare them for participation in wider society.

5.1. Eliciting the Views of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

There has been a notable increase in literature exploring how the views of CYP with special educational needs (SEN) are elicited. This development is likely linked to legislative and policy changes, including the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015), alongside a renewed emphasis on inclusion for CYP with SEN in mainstream education (Shaw, 2017).

The literature reviewed in this section focuses specifically on eliciting the views of CYP with SEN, as previous evidence suggests that this group may face additional barriers to participation. These barriers include difficulties with mental capacity or communication (Huggins, Donnan, Cameron & Williams, 2021) and anxiety, particularly among autistic pupils (Magiati et al., 2015). Consequently, researchers have explored alternative communication methods—such as video (Simpson, Imms &

Keen, 2021) and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019)—to support CYP in expressing their views. These approaches also reflect the statutory requirement within the SEND Code of Practice to use appropriate methods to enable CYP to communicate their preferences.

Simpson, Imms and Keen (2021) examined the activities of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at home and in the community to support the inclusion of pupil voice in educational settings. Their study parallels the work of Giles and Rowley (2020), as both investigations used video technology to facilitate CYP's self-expression. Participants in Simpson et al.'s study self-recorded their experiences and took part in semi-structured interviews, enabling them to narrate and expand upon their activities in depth. The use of video afforded children ownership over their contributions, allowing them to choose what to record and how to present their views. The researchers concluded that this method enabled a richer understanding of the children's lived experiences. Linked to Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, this approach aligns with the 'adult-initiated, shared decisions with children' stage. Although adults initiated the research process, children exercised meaningful control over how their views were communicated, reducing the risk of tokenism.

Fayette and Bond (2018) investigated methods for eliciting the views of YP with ASD during transition planning in two special schools. Their findings highlighted the value of person-centred approaches, including opportunities for pupils to visit post-16 settings to support their understanding of future options. While these approaches enabled pupils to conceptualise their aspirations, final decisions were ultimately made by school staff and local authorities, influenced by factors such as funding, availability of placements and perceived suitability. Staff also viewed themselves as experts in determining pupils' next steps. This pattern reflects the 'consulted and informed' stage of Hart's (1992) model: YP were asked for their views and informed about the process, but they had limited influence over final decisions. Although person-centred planning supported understanding, the adult-led nature of decision-making suggests that participation remained largely tokenistic.

Pearlman and Michaels (2019) explored the use of AAC tools to elicit the views of young people with moderate, severe and profound learning disabilities in a special school. Researchers filmed pupils responding to a questionnaire about their school experiences, independence, life outside school and future aspirations. Staff supported pupils using Makaton, symbols and music, and parents and staff later viewed the video clips to assess pupils' understanding and engagement. The study concluded that AAC methods, including video, may be effective for eliciting views for

EHCPs and ARMs, particularly when CYP are given the option to communicate in their preferred format. This aligns with the Children and Families Act (2014), which emphasises the use of appropriate resources to support CYP's participation. From the perspective of Hart's (1992) model, the study demonstrates how technology can facilitate participation by reducing communication barriers, although decision-making remained adult-led.

Farmer and Stringer (2023) examined the views of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) who rely on adults and alternative communication tools to express their preferences. Their findings indicated that gathering views over an extended period, rather than during a single planning meeting, enabled more accurate and meaningful participation. Children with PMLD required additional time to explore options and respond to activities, and longitudinal approaches allowed their preferences to emerge more clearly. This contrasts with earlier findings that pupils may struggle to participate in meetings due to difficulties responding to questions in real time (Huggins et al., 2021). Farmer and Stringer's (2023) work suggests that sustained engagement may support movement up Hart's (1992) ladder by enabling CYP to contribute more authentically, even when communication is heavily mediated by adults.

Across the literature, technology-based methods such as video (Simpson, Imms & Keen, 2021) and AAC tools (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019) appear to support participation by providing flexible, non-restrictive formats for CYP to express their views. These approaches can generate rich and accurate insights into CYP's preferences and experiences. However, despite these advances, final decision-making often remains in the hands of adults—parents, carers or professionals—who are positioned as the 'experts' (Fayette & Bond, 2018). When viewed through Hart's (1992) framework, this suggests that while CYP may experience high levels of involvement in expressing their views, participation frequently stalls before reaching the higher levels of shared or child-initiated decision-making. As a result, participation may still be perceived as tokenistic, particularly when CYP's contributions do not influence outcomes.

Overall, literature on eliciting the views of CYP with SEN demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of current participatory practices. Across studies, researchers have developed creative and flexible methods—such as video-based approaches (Simpson, Imms & Keen, 2021) and AAC tools (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019)—to reduce communication barriers and enable CYP to express their preferences in meaningful ways. These methods reflect a growing commitment to supporting CYP's participation, consistent with the expectations set out in the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015).

However, when examined through Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, a consistent pattern emerges: although CYP often experience high levels of involvement in expressing their views, their influence over decision-making remains limited. Studies such as Fayette and Bond (2018) illustrate that even when person-centred approaches are used, final decisions frequently rest with adults who are positioned as the 'experts'. This situates participation on the lower to middle levels of Hart's (1992) ladder—typically within the 'consulted and informed' or 'adult-initiated, shared decisions with children' stages—rather than progressing towards shared or child-initiated decision-making.

The literature also highlights that participation is most authentic when CYP have ownership over how their views are communicated, as seen in Simpson, Imms and Keen's (2021) use of video. These approaches demonstrate movement towards the higher levels of Hart's (1992) ladder by enabling CYP to shape the process and content of their contributions. Yet, the persistence of adult-led decision-making means that participation often falls short of the collaborative, power-sharing practices represented at the top of Hart's (1992) ladder.

Overall, the evidence suggests that while there have been enhanced ways in which CYP with SEN can express their views, structural and cultural barriers continue to limit their influence. In addition, Hart's (1992) ladder provides a useful analytical tool for understanding this point, as CYP may be enabled to speak, but they are not always empowered to shape outcomes. This highlights the need for continued development of participatory practices that move beyond consultation towards genuine shared decision-making, particularly within statutory processes such as EHCPs and ARMs.

5.3 Barriers to eliciting the views of children and young people with SEN

There has been growing interest in eliciting the views of CYP, accompanied by an expansion in the strategies used to support CYP with SEN to participate in decision-making. These approaches include the use of video-based methods (Simpson, Imms & Keen, 2021) and a range of adapted communication tools. Alongside this, research has highlighted barriers to gaining the views of CYP with SEN, particularly those related to language demands, conceptual understanding and the ability to make inferences. Difficulties with the use of questioning and with understanding abstract concepts are frequently cited challenges (Lewis, 2009; Preece & Jordan, 2010).

Lewis (2009), for example, explored the challenges of eliciting the views of children with ASD regarding spirituality and religion. The study found that facilitators included the use of repeated

questioning and the use of statements rather than direct questions. Direct questioning was seen to create a power imbalance between adult and child, whereas statements reduced this dynamic and supported more authentic responses. These findings align with Guldberg (2008), who reported that children with ASD were more responsive to structured questions than to open-ended ones. In contrast, difficulties with understanding abstract concepts, recalling and discussing personal experiences, and identifying or expressing emotions were identified as significant barriers to eliciting CYP's views.

Preece and Jordan (2010) similarly investigated the views of children with ASD about their daily life and experiences in social care. They found that participants struggled to respond to abstract questions, such as those about wishes or aspirations, and often found it difficult to reflect on their own emotions or those of others. Responses such as "I don't know" were common when asked to describe the feelings of family members or social care staff. These findings are consistent with Tuna (2023), who identified that children with ASD may experience challenges in expressing and evaluating their emotions. They also align with evidence from Chiu et al. (2022), who found that CYP with ASD often experience difficulties with Theory of Mind, which can affect their ability to recognise the thoughts and feelings of others and influence their social interactions. These cognitive and social-emotional factors may therefore shape the quality and depth of responses CYP provide when asked about their experiences.

Further evidence from Huggins, Donnan, Cameron and Williams (2021) suggests that emotional self-awareness in children with ASD may be comparable to that of their peers in early childhood but diverges during adolescence. Their research also highlights that social communication needs can affect CYP's ability to respond to questions, reinforcing the idea that participation is closely linked to communication competence. This supports earlier findings by Preece and Jordan (2010), suggesting that CYP's participation with adults may be contingent on their social communication skills, including their understanding of language, emotional concepts and social cues.

The literature illustrates that the extent to which CYP with SEN can meaningfully participate in discussions about their lives is closely shaped by the communication and cognitive demands placed upon them. When CYP struggle with abstract questioning, emotional expression or Theory of Mind—as highlighted by Lewis (2009), Preece and Jordan (2010), Tuna (2023) and Chiu et al. (2022)—their contributions may be limited or misunderstood. Within Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, these barriers can result in CYP remaining on the lower levels of the ladder, where participation is adult-led, consultative or even tokenistic. For example, if CYP are asked questions

they cannot interpret or respond to, adults may unintentionally dominate the interaction, reducing CYP's role to providing minimal or answers without detail.

Conversely, when adults adapt their communication methods—such as using structured prompts, statements instead of direct questions, repeated questioning or visual supports—CYP are better able to express their views in ways that feel accessible and authentic. These adaptations help shift participation towards the middle or higher levels of Hart's (1992) ladder, where CYP's views are not only elicited but also meaningfully considered within decision-making. The research therefore suggests that achieving genuine participation for CYP with SEN is not solely a matter of intention but depends on adults' ability to create communication environments that reduce cognitive load, minimise power imbalances and support CYP's preferred modes of expression.

6.0. Decision-making for children and young people/The Role of Choice for children and young people

Ganoa, Palikara and Castro (2018) explored the views and experiences of CYP with ASD transitioning to post-16 education and employment. Using semi-structured interviews, the researchers found that CYP routinely consulted parents, teachers and support staff when making decisions about their next steps. However, two participants reported having to make decisions independently when their preferences differed from those of their parents. Overall, the findings indicated that CYP wished to become more independent but experienced anxiety about transitioning to a new setting, particularly due to concerns about losing friendships and adapting to unfamiliar environments. This investigation suggests that CYP were positioned at the forefront of decision-making, drawing on stakeholders for guidance rather than having decisions made on their behalf.

Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2008) examined the influence of schools on CYP's decision-making regarding post-16 pathways. Their findings showed that the extent of school involvement varied according to school leadership, ethos, socio-economic context and the nature of guidance provided. Schools serving communities with higher socio-economic status tended to prioritise university-focused pathways, whereas those in lower socio-economic areas placed greater emphasis on vocational routes. This suggests that CYP's participation in decision-making may be shaped by systemic factors such as socio-economic status, rather than solely by individual preferences or capabilities.

Merrick (2020) investigated the perspectives of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and teachers with an interest in SEN to explore their experiences of practice and perceived barriers to CYP participation. The study found that CYP's involvement was largely limited to discussions about immediate and everyday matters, such as their likes and dislikes in school. In contrast, CYP were less involved in more abstract or conceptual aspects of decision-making, including planning the provision intended to support their needs. This highlights a gap between involving CYP in surface-level discussions and enabling them to participate meaningfully in shaping their educational support.

Across these studies, a consistent theme emerges: CYP's participation in post-16 decision-making is shaped not only by their individual preferences and capabilities but also by the social, relational and structural contexts in which decisions occur. When viewed through Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, the findings illustrate varying degrees of participation, ranging from consultation to more collaborative forms of decision-making. Ganoa, Palikara and Castro (2018) provide evidence of CYP operating at the higher levels of Hart's ladder, particularly *"adult-initiated, shared decisions with children."* CYP actively sought guidance from parents, teachers and support staff, yet retained ownership of their final decisions—especially when their views diverged from those of adults. This demonstrates a participatory environment in which CYP's autonomy is respected and their decision-making agency is foregrounded.

In contrast, the findings of Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2008) highlight how systemic factors—such as school ethos, socio-economic context and institutional priorities—can constrain CYP's participation. When schools steer CYP towards particular pathways based on socio-economic assumptions, participation risks slipping towards the lower levels of Hart's (1992) ladder, such as *"consulted and informed"* or even *"assigned but informed."* CYP may be offered information or guidance, but the direction of decision-making is shaped predominantly by adult or institutional agendas rather than CYP's own aspirations.

Merrick's (2020) study further illustrates this pattern by showing that CYP's involvement is often limited to discussions about immediate, concrete aspects of school life, while more abstract or strategic decisions—such as planning their SEN provision—remain adult-led. This reflects participation at the lower to middle levels of Hart's (1992) ladder, where CYP are consulted about day-to-day matters but are not meaningfully involved in shaping the broader decisions that affect their educational support.

6.0. Annual Review Meetings

As CYP transition to adulthood, they are increasingly encouraged to advocate for their views, particularly in relation to Preparing for Adulthood (Tomlinson & Oland, 2023). Ganoa, Castro and Palikara (2020) examined the views and aspirations of CYP with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during their transition to post-16 education and employment by conducting a content analysis of 12 EHCPs. Their findings indicated that over half of the EHCPs did not specify how CYP's voices had been facilitated. In several cases, EHCPs included statements such as "he was present at the annual review meeting," which suggests that CYP's participation may have been limited to physical attendance rather than active contribution. It may also be inferred that CYP were not always informed that they could contribute during the meeting. Consequently, CYP's involvement appeared tokenistic, reflecting a non-participatory role when considered against Hart's (1992) participation model.

This is inconsistent with statutory expectations, as the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department for Health, 2015) requires CYP's views to be meaningfully incorporated into EHCPs. These findings align with Shepherd, Hanson and Dodd (2018), who reported that CYP aged 16–25 were hesitant to agree that the goals outlined in their EHCPs were likely to be achieved.

This suggests that the influence of CYP's voices on goal-setting within EHCPs may be limited, undermining the person-centred principles outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department for Health, 2015, sections 9.22–9.23). Similar to Ganoa, Castro and Palikara's (2020) findings, CYP's involvement in these processes appears to be largely tokenistic. Within Annual Review Meetings (ARMs), where decision-making often favours adults, Cochrane (2016) found that SENCOs and EPs played a significant role in shaping parents' decisions during the EHCP process. This aligns with Eccleston (2016), who reported that parents' experiences of the EHCP process were heavily influenced by the professionals involved.

These findings suggest that although adults ultimately make the final decisions, there may be a hierarchy of influence, with certain professionals exerting greater authority than others.
Ahad, Thompson and Hall (2022) further explored the collaborative nature of the EHCP process and the extent to which CYP and their parents were central to decision-making. Their findings identified limited collaboration from health and social care services and poor communication across agencies. Parents' views were often excluded from the final version of the EHCP despite

being sought during the early stages of the process. CYP's involvement also varied considerably depending on their age or perceived level of competency to contribute. This variability highlights ongoing inconsistencies in how participation is facilitated and raises concerns about the authenticity of CYP's involvement in ARMs.

Across the literature on ARMs and the wider EHCP process, a reoccurrence was that although CYP are legally obligated to be central to decision-making, their actual participation often falls short of meaningful involvement. When examined through Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, the studies reviewed illustrate that CYP's engagement frequently remains on the lower levels of the ladder, where participation is limited, adult-directed or tokenistic. Ganoa, Castro and Palikara's (2020) analysis of EHCPs highlights this clearly. CYP were often recorded as merely *present* at their Annual Review, with no indication of how their views were elicited or incorporated. This reflects participation at the *"tokenism"* or *"assigned but informed"* stages of Hart's (1992) ladder, where CYP may be included procedurally but lack genuine influence. Such practices contrast the statutory requirement for CYP's views to shape their EHCPs, as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (2015). Similarly, Shepherd, Hanson and Dodd's (2018) finding that CYP doubted whether their EHCP goals would be fulfilled suggests that their contributions may not meaningfully inform planning. This again aligns with the lower levels of Hart's (1992) ladder, where CYP are consulted but their input does not shape outcomes.

The literature also highlights the influence of adult hierarchies within ARMs. Cochrane (2016) and Eccleston (2016) both found that professionals such as SENCOs and EPs often shaped parental decisions, indicating that even among adults, influence is unevenly distributed. Ahad, Thompson and Hall (2022) further demonstrated that collaboration across services is inconsistent, and that both parents' and CYP's views may be diluted or omitted in the final EHCP. These findings suggest that CYP's participation is constrained not only by individual factors but also by systemic and inter-professional dynamics that reinforce adult control. Within Hart's (1992) framework, this reflects a failure to progress towards the higher levels—*"adult-initiated, shared decisions with children"* or *"child-initiated, shared decisions with adults."*

Taken together, the literature indicates that although policy frameworks emphasise person-centred planning and CYP participation, practice often remains adult-led. CYP's involvement is frequently symbolic rather than substantive, with limited opportunities for them to influence decisions about their education and future. Hart's (1992) model provides a useful lens for understanding this gap between policy and practice, highlighting the need for ARMs to move beyond procedural inclusion

towards genuine shared decision-making that empowers CYP to contribute meaningfully to their EHCPs.

Summary

This review has outlined the evolution of 'pupil voice', tracing its development from an opportunity for CYP to express their views regarding care placements, as established in the Children Act (1989), to a central component of educational decision-making (Ganoa, Palikara & Castro, 2018). Legislative changes, particularly the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015), have reinforced a person-centred approach, placing CYP's views at the heart of assessment and planning processes.

Across the selected literature, it was notable that many participants had a diagnosis of ASD and/or speech, language and communication needs, as seen in studies by Simpson, Imms and Keen (2021), Fayette and Bond (2018) and Pearlman and Michaels (2019). This reflects national trends reported by the Office for National Statistics (2024), which identified ASD as the most common primary need among pupils with an EHCP. These characteristics have important implications for participation: CYP with ASD may experience social communication difficulties that affect their ability to respond to abstract or inferential questions (Preece & Jordan, 2010). As a result, researchers have developed alternative methods to support participation, such as video-based approaches (Simpson, Imms & Keen, 2021).

Furthermore, CYP with ASD often experience comorbid needs, including speech, language and communication difficulties (Petinou, 2021) and generalised anxiety (Saunders, Kirk & Waldie, 2015), which can further affect their ability to articulate their views. The literature also suggests that research on eliciting the views of CYP with SEN remains in its early stages (Fayette & Bond, 2017), making it challenging to fully evaluate the impact of recent legislation on CYP's advocacy and participation.

This review has also examined how participation models, such as Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, can support the identification of CYP's involvement in decision-making. This framework highlights the progression from tokenistic forms of involvement towards more collaborative, shared decision-making between CYP and professionals. Within person-centred approaches, such models have informed the development of practices designed to enhance participation, including the use of video-based methods (Simpson, Imms, & Keen, 2021) and

longitudinal approaches to gathering CYP's views (Farmer & Stringer, 2023). Despite these developments, barriers persist. Difficulties with abstract reasoning (Preece & Jordan, 2010) and evidence of tokenistic involvement in statutory processes such as ARMs (Ganoa, Castro, & Palikara, 2020) indicate that CYP's participation is not always meaningful or influential.

A further gap identified in this review concerns the limited literature from England exploring how CYP in special school settings contribute to decisions about their transition to post-16 education or employment. The SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Education, 2015) emphasises the importance of person-centred planning but provides no specific guidance on eliciting the views of CYP with EHCPs during ARMs in special schools. Given that CYP in these settings may have moderate, severe or profound needs (Pearlman & Michaels, 2019), this lack of guidance may contribute to inconsistencies in practice and reduced opportunities for CYP to express their views. Although ARMs are described as collaborative processes, existing evidence suggests that CYP's contributions are often minimal (Ganoa, Castro, & Palikara, 2020).

Collectively, these findings highlight a clear need for further investigation into the annual review process, particularly for CYP in special school settings. Understanding how CYP's views are elicited—and the extent to which they influence decision-making—remains essential for ensuring that person-centred principles are enacted in practice and that CYP are genuinely empowered within the EHCP process.

Chapter 2-Empirical Paper

Key terminology

This paper will refer to the key terminology below throughout due to its focus on young people aged 16 or above.

Post-16-Post-16 refers to young people who have completed their secondary education and must remain in full-time education or enrol in a variation of employment such as an Apprenticeship/Traineeship/Internship until they turn 18.

Preparing for adulthood- Preparing for adulthood (PFA) can be defined as planning the future of a young person transitioning to adulthood. PFA is divided into the following categories: 'Employment', 'Community Inclusion'; Independent Living Skills'' 'Health and Wellbeing'. Within the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015), it is mandatory for there to be discussions with children and young people with EHCPs aged 14+ to discuss the areas mentioned earlier in PFA so that there can be an effective plan to ensure that children and young people can successfully transition to adulthood.

'**Pupil Voice'-** A school-wide or individual commitment to listen to the views of children and young people.

1.0. Introduction and Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the research area and rationale for this investigation. It describes the national and local contexts within the research area, explains key terminology, and gives the rationale for the research.

1.1. National Context

There are over 1.6 million pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in England (Office for National Statistics, 2024). Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are defined as range of needs such as physical disabilities (Allen, Milne, Velija & Radley, 2024), social and emotional and mental health needs and specific learning difficulties, e.g. Dyslexia (Schmidt, 2022), which can impact a child or young person's ability to learn within their education setting.

In England, there are different tiers of support available to Children and Young People (CYP) with SEND, for example, Universal support (support all children and young people can access without additional SEND required), Targeted support (additional focused support to support children and young people such as group interventions) and Specialist support (individualised support for children with complex learning needs). CYP with needs identified above targeted support within their education settings may receive direct involvement from specialist services such as Speech and Language Therapists and Educational Psychologists to identify the level of individualised support they need to access learning through Education Health Care Needs Assessments (Department for Health and Education, 2015).

Education Health Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) are comprehensive assessments of a CYP's special educational needs that are undertaken to identify the targeted support they will need to make progress towards defined outcomes. This process can take up to 20 weeks to complete. According to the Children and Families Act (2014), local authorities are obligated to conduct EHCNAs involving professionals such as Educational Psychologists (EPs) to carry out assessments for reports such as Psychological Advice which outlines a child's strengths and needs, pupil and parent's views alongside the provision and outcomes to support them in their setting (Vivash & Morgan, 2019).

Once an EHCNA is completed, in some cases, a CYP may be issued with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), which is a legally binding document that outlines the provision that must be

provided to the child or young person in their education setting which can include access to additional funding (Department for Health and Education, 2015). During the EHCP process, a core aspiration within the legislation is that the process should be undertaken using a person-centred approach in line with the Children and Families Act (2014).

In some local authorities this is facilitated through co-production between parents, children/young people, teachers and relevant professionals. A core aspect of the EHCP process is the importance of 'Pupil Voice' and the need to elicit the views of CYP involved during this process. This will enable practitioners that are supporting CYP to have their views influence decisions that are made about them, such as during EHCNAs. This is also reflected in other statutory processes, such as Annual Review Meetings (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020).

Annual Review Meetings (ARMs) are yearly statutory meetings that must be held to review a child or young person's EHCP. ARMs include discussions about CYP's experiences in their setting, goals and aspirations and targets. If CYP are in Year 9 or above, ARMS should feature discussions about their transition to adulthood (Palikara, 2020). The guidance related to ARMs states that the school should facilitate the meetings and invite the child/young person, their parent, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and a staff member from the local authority (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015). Agencies such as EPs or professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) are invited to these meetings but, in reality, rarely attend due to issues with capacity and national shortages e.g. as referenced in a report from the Department of Education (2023) on the Educational Psychology workforce, which highlighted that Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) were experiencing difficulties recruiting EPs.

1.12 National Context on Pupil Advocation

There have been significant developments aimed at strengthening child advocacy, particularly through the Children and Families Act (2014). Within this context, 'Pupil Voice' refers to CYP being given opportunities to self-advocate by sharing their views with adults or professionals, including during statutory processes such as ARMs (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020). All children have the right to express their views on matters that affect them and to participate as fully as they are able in decisions that impact their lives (Department for Health and Department for Education), a principle embedded in both the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015). However, the extent to which CYP can self-advocate may depend on their mental capacity; where CYP are unable to express their

views independently, parents or professionals may communicate on their behalf (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). A key statutory context in which CYP with EHCPs are expected to share their views is the ARM (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020).

1.2. Local Context

The Eastern region local authority in which the researcher was placed published a strategic plan outlining its commitment to supporting CYP within the community. Central to this plan was a system designed to position CYP at the forefront of providing their views on key areas such as health and wellbeing, strategic priorities and safeguarding. Local priorities included promoting the emotional resilience of CYP and strengthening their capacity to cope with and adapt to stressful situations. Within education, the local authority aimed to develop more inclusive schools to enhance the participation of CYP with SEND in mainstream settings. To support this, the authority has begun creating additional forums for CYP to self-advocate, including youth groups and extracurricular sports clubs.

The researcher's placement within the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) aligned with these priorities, with the service seeking to strengthen its links with special schools through direct work with CYP with complex needs and through systemic support for school staff. Across all initiatives, the local authority emphasised the importance of ensuring that CYP and their families remain central to decision-making processes, with a commitment to working collaboratively and innovatively alongside CYP to shape future strategies.

2.0. Researcher's Interest in this topic

Throughout my personal and professional experiences, I have developed a strong interest in eliciting the views of CYP during casework. This stems from my belief that doing so provides an important opportunity for them to advocate for themselves and to contribute directly or indirectly to decisions that affect them, ensuring that their perspectives meaningfully inform practice.

My earliest experience of gathering pupil views occurred when I worked as a Teaching Assistant supporting a child with SEN. I collected their views to help them communicate their experiences during Key Stage 2 and to inform future staff about their strengths and needs as they transitioned into a new year group. Although this task was not formally required, I felt it was essential to ensure that the child received appropriate support and that staff had a clearer understanding of how best to work with them.

I later worked in a residential home for adults with autism, where I supported a young adult who could not self-advocate verbally but communicated using tools such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). This experience prompted me to reflect on the extent to which they had been involved in the decision to move into residential care and whether their views were routinely sought and considered. It highlighted for me the importance of accessible communication methods and the ethical responsibility to ensure that individuals who rely on alternative communication are not excluded from decision-making processes.

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), my interest in working with CYP has continued to deepen. I have worked with young people who felt that their views were not listened to or facilitated, which in some cases contributed to a breakdown in their relationship with school. This has manifested in withdrawal, disengagement or difficulties during transitions to new settings. These experiences have led me to reflect on the individual and systemic factors that may contribute to such situations, particularly for CYP with SEND. Many of these CYP have additional needs—such as speech, language or communication difficulties—that may affect their ability to self-advocate without appropriate support. This has reinforced my commitment to understanding how educational systems can better facilitate meaningful participation and ensure that CYP's voices are genuinely heard and acted upon.

3.0. Relevant Psychological Theory

Narrative psychology explores individuals' life stories and the ways in which storytelling helps them make sense of their experiences (Sarbin, 1998). A central feature of this approach is its emphasis on empowering individuals by positioning them as experts in their own lives and fostering mutual understanding within and across groups (Popp-Baier, 2013). This aligns closely with narrative inquiry, a qualitative research methodology that seeks to understand experience through the stories people tell and the meanings they construct from those stories. Narrative inquiry views experience as storied, relational and situated within specific social and cultural contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), making it particularly suited to exploring personal accounts of educational processes such as ARMs.

Within the context of this investigation, adopting a narrative psychology approach alongside principles of narrative inquiry will enable the researcher to offer participants the opportunity to provide extended narrative accounts of their experiences of the annual review process at a special school in an Eastern region local authority. This approach supports participants in sharing their

stories in relation to their annual review meetings, their relationships with staff, the extent to which they felt included in decision-making and the tools or methods used to elicit their views. By drawing on narrative inquiry, the research acknowledges that CYP's experiences are shaped not only by events but also by how they interpret, remember and communicate those events, allowing for a richer and more nuanced understanding of their participation in the annual review process.

4.0 Epistemological and Ontological Position

Ontology concerns the study of existence and the nature of reality, exploring how we determine what does or does not exist, whereas epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and how we come to understand the world (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). A constructivist epistemological position underpins this investigation, as constructivism views an individual's reality as being actively constructed through their interpretation and reflection on past experiences, leading to the development of new understandings of the world (Dagar & Yadav, 2016). Constructivism assumes that learning is an ongoing, dynamic process in which individuals construct knowledge through continual engagement with their environments.

Within this investigation, constructivism is particularly relevant to the annual review process, as YP, parents/carers and school staff may each hold different perceptions of what an ARM is and how it should operate. These differing constructions of reality may stem from previous experiences, such as the extent to which YP have been enabled to participate in decision-making (Hart, 1992) or the specific practices schools use to elicit pupil views during ARMs (Palikara, 2020). Understanding these varied perspectives aligns with a constructivist stance, recognising that meaning is shaped through experience, interaction and context.

4.1. Positionality and Epistemological Position

The researcher occupies a dual role, working both within a local authority and as a postgraduate researcher. As part of their placement, TEPs are required to fulfil statutory responsibilities, including contributing to EHCNAs (Vivash & Morgan, 2019) and supporting the early-prevention offer within their EPS (Lee & Woods, 2017). This has involved the researcher facilitating casework across a range of educational settings, from mainstream schools to special schools within the Eastern region. Throughout placements it was notable that casework involving YP aged 16–25 is rare, despite EPs and TEPs being obligated to work with CYP up to the age of 25 who have special educational needs (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015).

The limited involvement of post-16 young people is particularly noteworthy given the national emphasis on supporting transitions into education, employment or training. Recent initiatives such as Traineeships and Apprenticeships (Education & Skills Funding Agency, 2021) aim to strengthen post-16 pathways, yet national data indicate a growing concern, with 11.9% of YP aged 16–24 identified as not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Office for National Statistics, 2023). This discrepancy highlights the importance of ensuring that YP with EHCPs are meaningfully supported during key transition processes.

From the perspective of the researcher as a postgraduate student, this investigation seeks to explore how the views of young people with EHCPs can be better supported and represented within ARMs. The study aims to generate insights that may inform recommendations for practice, particularly regarding how educational settings and professionals can enhance participation and ensure that YPs perspectives shape decision-making during the post-16 phase.

6.0. Research Rationale and Purpose

An overview of the literature search indicated that, regarding CYP's 'Pupil Voice', literature primarily featured participants who had autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and were attending mainstream school settings. Research has also found that CYP's involvement was often relegated to 'tokenistic', as school staff and parents were perceived as the experts in decision-making (e.g., Fayette & Bond, 2018).

In the research related to ARMs, the literature has largely focused on deficits in practice when involving CYP. For instance, Palikara (2020) and Ganoa, Castro & Palikara (2020) found that while YP attended their ARMs, their role was 'tokenistic', with minimal involvement in the decision-making process and limited opportunities to self-advocate. This lack of meaningful participation contributed to unrealistic targets being set within updated EHCPs and had implications for YP's transitions into post-16 education or employment.

The literature also identified a key theme that many YP did not attend their ARMs due to experiencing anxiety (Saunders, Kirk & Waldie, 2015) or not understanding the annual review process (Palikara, 2020). In contrast, participation was enhanced when facilitators enabled CYP to advocate for their views by providing opportunities to discuss activities that interested them and by allowing them to self-report using accessible formats such as video (Simpson, Imms & Keen, 2020).

It was also identified that within the literature on ARMs, there was a dearth of research exploring how YP's views are elicited within special schools, despite a rise in the prevalence of YP with SEND and increasing national demand for special school places (Thomas, Dobson & Loxley, 2023). As such, based on this researcher's literature search findings, the present investigation will explore how YP's views were elicited within a special school and the impact this had on their decision-making when transitioning to post-16 education or employment.

7.0. Justification

This research is positioned within national and local priorities that emphasise the importance of pupil views and post-16 planning through the statutory annual review process. It also sits within the broader context of the 'Voice of the Child' agenda, which promotes collaboration between YP, parents/carers and school staff. Although the pupil-view process is often presented as being rooted in person-centred meetings—where the YP's views are expected to meaningfully inform decision-making—evidence suggests that this is not consistently achieved in practice.

Research indicates that YP's views are frequently not included in the final decision-making process; they may be physically present at meetings but have limited influence over outcomes. This can result in their views being inaccurately represented and may negatively affect their transition to post-16 education or employment (Palikara, 2020; Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020).

In addition, Allen, Milne, Velija & Radley (2024) identified a limited body of literature exploring the views of CYP with severe learning difficulties who attend special schools. This gap is particularly notable given that YP in special school settings may require alternative tools or approaches to self-advocate effectively (Leatherman & Wegner, 2021). Such factors may influence how their views are elicited during their ARM and, consequently, may impact the quality of their participation and the decisions made about their post-16 pathways.

This has led to this investigation focusing on the following research questions:

- How are young people's views elicited for their annual review meeting?
- How are young people's views included in the decision-making process for their transition to post-16 education or employment?
- How do young people and key stakeholders perceive the annual review meeting?
- What is the extent of external involvement, i.e., local authority, during annual review meetings?

Methodology

8.0. Research Purpose

This current study aims to explore YPs' experiences of the annual review process. In addition, the investigation will examine how inclusive YP's pupil views were during their ARM in a special school by comparing different case studies. It is hoped that the findings from this research will support EPs within an Eastern Region local authority and contribute to enhancing the inclusion of YP's (post-16) views during future ARMs in special school settings.

8.1. Research design

Research methodology can be defined as the overarching principle that guides the design and implementation of a research study (Moore, Howard, Boling, Leary & Hodges, 2023). Within research, three broad methodological approaches are commonly identified: Quantitative (Bieńkowska & Sikorski, 2024), Qualitative (Bieńkowska & Sikorski, 2024) and Mixed-Methods (Kakai, 2024). For this investigation, a qualitative methodology was selected, as qualitative approaches are particularly suited to exploring individuals' opinions, behaviours and lived experiences in depth (Hendriken, Westbroek, Janssen & Van Muijwijk-Koezen, 2024).

A qualitative methodology was also appropriate given the need to investigate an area that requires further exploration. The literature review identified a lack of evidence on how YP within special schools are included in the annual review process. Similarly, Allen, Milne, Velija & Radley (2024) highlighted a limited body of research focusing on eliciting the views of CYP in special school contexts. This gap is significant for EP practice, as gathering the views of CYP is a core component of the EP role, including during statutory processes such as EHCNAs (Williamson, 2022).

Furthermore, casework involving YP who are post-16 remains relatively rare within EP practice (Morris & Atkinson, 2018), despite statutory guidance requiring EPs to work with CYP up to the age of 25 with SEND (Department for Education and Health, 2015). This investigation therefore has the potential to provide valuable insights into how EPs can support YP during statutory processes such as the annual review (Palikara, 2020), particularly as EPs are routinely invited to contribute to ARMs. By adopting a qualitative methodology, the study aims to explore the experiences of YP in special schools and contribute to improving inclusive practice within post-16 pathways.

8.2. Choosing a qualitative research approach

Qualitative research methods aim to understand the attitudes, perspectives and experiences of a targeted demographic (Opdenakker, 2006). Hallberg (2006, p. 141) explains that *"qualitative researchers study phenomena and processes in their natural settings and intend to make sense of those matters in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Through detailed interviewing, participant observations, and rich descriptions of the social world qualitative researchers hope to come close to the actor's perspective and try to capture his or her point of view."* This emphasis on meaning-making and lived experience aligns closely with the aims of the present investigation. Within this study, qualitative research was used to explore the experiences of YP, parents/carers and school staff members regarding their ARM in a special school within an Eastern Region Local Authority.

Several qualitative approaches were considered, including open-ended questionnaires (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004) and observations (Ciesielski, Boström & Öhlander, 2018). However, open-ended questionnaires were deemed unsuitable as they may not elicit sufficiently rich detail about key elements of ARMs, such as how YP's views are included or how they participate in decision-making (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004). This is particularly relevant given that the researcher is working with YP with SEN, who may have difficulties understanding or interpreting written questions (Huggins, Donnan, Cameron & Williams, 2021).

Research by Vandesande, van Keer, Dhondt & Maes (2022) similarly highlights that CYP with SEN may have cognitive needs that affect their ability to comprehend and respond to questionnaire items. In contrast, interviews conducted in person allow the researcher to adapt questions in real time, clarify meaning and scaffold understanding—flexibility that is not possible with a fixed questionnaire, which would require resubmission to the ethics committee if amended during the project.

Observation-based methods (Ciesielski, Boström & Öhlander, 2018), such as observing ARMs directly, were also considered. However, observational data may not provide an accurate or naturalistic portrayal of how ARMs typically unfold. Evidence suggests that when participants are aware they are being observed, their behaviour may change, reducing validity (Weinrott & Jones, 1984; Strudwick, 2019). This is particularly relevant in the context of ARMs, where the presence of an observer could heighten anxiety for YP (Saunders, Kirk & Waldie, 2015) and potentially influence the outcome of the observation. This could undermine the aim of understanding authentic experiences of the annual review process.

8.2.1 Case Study Approaches

A case study is an in-depth exploration of a case situated within its real-world context (Crowe, Creswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh, 2011). Case study approaches can involve either single or multiple case study designs (Gustafsson, 2017). Gustafsson (2017) identified that single case studies can be advantageous in enabling researchers to develop a deep understanding of a specific topic and can be particularly useful for "creating a high-quality theory". In contrast, multiple case study designs tend to produce more conclusive findings and, at the time of Gustafsson's review, were more commonly used within the literature.

A case study approach was selected for this investigation as the researcher aimed to gain a collective understanding of how ARMs are facilitated by all parties involved in the process—YP, parents/carers and school staff—within a single special school. Case study research has demonstrated real-world applicability in educational contexts, such as Davronzhon & Simon's (2021) exploration of CYP with English as an Additional Language in a secondary school in England, and Goodhall & Atkinson's (2020) investigation into children's perceptions of play in schools across England and Wales.

Within this study, a case study design enabled the researcher to examine multiple ARMs within the same setting to identify consistent themes across meetings through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2017). This approach was intended to provide insight into how YP's views were included in decision-making and the extent of their participation during ARMs, particularly given the emphasis on person-centred planning within the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department for Health, 2015).

Case study designs also offer the advantage of allowing cross-case analysis, enabling researchers to identify similarities and differences across cases (Brink, 2018). However, a recognised limitation of case study research is the challenge of anonymisation, as the depth and specificity of the data can make individuals or settings identifiable (Crowe, Creswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh, 2011).

In this investigation, particular care was taken to ensure anonymity due to the relatively small number of special schools specialising in communication and interaction and the characteristics of the participants. Ethical approval was obtained by implementing measures such as anonymising all participant names and assigning pseudonyms during data analysis. Additionally, as participants

had EHCPs, they were considered a potentially vulnerable group, further necessitating careful ethical consideration.

While this case study focused on a single school, individual interviews were conducted with participants across the following categories:

- *Pupil*
- *Parent/Carers*
- *Members of staff* (including class teachers and the Head of Sixth Form)

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to enable participants to recall and reflect on their experiences of their ARM. This approach was selected in response to literature indicating that YP's voices are often not meaningfully facilitated during ARMs (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020; Palikara, 2020). Conducting interviews individually was intended to provide participants with the opportunity to share their experiences in a context separate from the formal meeting environment. The literature also highlights that anxiety can deter YP from attending meetings (Saunders, Kirk & Waldie, 2015). Therefore, arranging interviews in a non-meeting environment was a deliberate choice to help participants—particularly YP—feel more comfortable and supported when expressing their views.

9.0. Research methods and data collection

9.1. Participant recruitment

After gaining ethical approval from the University of East Anglia (UEA) ethics board, the researcher initiated recruitment by contacting mainstream and special schools within their local authority, as well as neighbouring Eastern Region local authorities. Recruitment emails were sent from the researcher's university email account to publicly accessible school email addresses. In addition, EPs within the researcher's local authority acted as gatekeepers by sharing the recruitment flyer and participant information and consent forms with their link schools. The recruitment email invited schools to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating in the project. Schools that expressed interest were offered an initial meeting—either face-to-face or virtual (via Microsoft Teams)—to discuss the project further and determine whether the investigation was feasible within their setting.

Following this process, a special school in an Eastern Region Local Authority contacted the researcher. A meeting was held with the Head of Sixth Form, during which the researcher outlined

the project and explained the inclusion criteria (see Figure 1.0.), such as requiring participants to have taken part in an ARM during the 2023/2024 academic year. These inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected to ensure the investigation focused on how ARMs were facilitated for YP in a special school context, given that post-16 ARMs and special school settings are underrepresented in the existing literature.

Once the Head of Sixth Form confirmed that the school could facilitate the project, information about the study was forwarded to the Head Teacher for formal approval. Throughout this process, the researcher made it clear to the Head of Sixth Form, the Head Teacher and all potential participants that the investigation was being conducted as an independent research project rather than as work commissioned by the local authority. After the Head Teacher granted permission for the study to proceed, they were asked to distribute consent forms to potential participants who met the eligibility criteria. Interested participants were instructed to email the researcher to confirm their willingness to take part, ask any questions about the project and return their signed consent forms. As all participants were over the age of 16, they provided their own informed consent.

Figure 1.0. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The table below outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants participating in this investigation.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Children and Young People (CYP): • Aged 14–18 and in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). • Have participated in an Annual Review Meeting (ARM) during the 2023/2024 academic year. To support accurate recall, the ARM must have occurred within three months prior to data collection. • Currently attending either a mainstream or special school setting. • Able to listen and respond to questions either orally or through alternative communication tools, with or without support. **Parents/Carers:** • Parent or carer of a CYP aged 14–18 with an EHCP. **School Staff:** • Member of staff working within a mainstream or special school setting, including Head Teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos),	**Children and Young People (CYP):** • CYP who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). • CYP with an EHCP who were aged 13 or younger. • CYP who had not participated in an Annual Review Meeting (ARM) during the 2023/2024 academic year, or whose ARM took place more than four months prior to data collection. • CYP who were not attending a mainstream or special school setting. • CYP who were unable to listen and respond to questions orally or through alternative communication tools, with or without support. **Parents/Carers:** • Individuals who were not the parent or carer of a CYP aged 14–18 with an EHCP. **School Staff:** • Individuals who were not members of school staff (e.g., Head Teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators, Class Teachers or Support Staff)

Class Teachers or Support Staff. •	working within a mainstream or special school setting.

Figure 2.0. Participant Characteristics

Figure 2.0. describes participant characteristics such as role, case study number, gender, EHCP and Key Stage. See below for more information.

Participants Number/Anonymised name	Role	Gender	Education Health Care Plan	Key Stage
01-Jamie	Young Person	Male	Yes	5
02-Melissa	Carer for Jamie	Female	N/A	N/A
03-Michael	Teacher for Jamie	Male	N/A	N/A
04-Jessy	Young Person	Female	Yes	5
05-Jenny	Carer for Jessey	Female	N/A	N/A
06-Amy	Head of Sixth Form	Female	N/A	N/A
07-Liam	Young Person	Male	Yes	4
08-David	Class Teacher for Liam	Male	N/A	N/A

**An interview with a 9th participant was planned, but due to time constraints and attempts to arrange a convenient interview, it was not possible to gain an interview with a parent.*

9.13. Research Setting

As noted earlier, participant recruitment primarily came from a special school in the Eastern Region. This school educates pupils aged 3–19 years with complex needs, including multi-sensory impairments and severe learning difficulties. The school also holds specialist status in Communication and Interaction, providing targeted support for pupils with a range of communication profiles. A variety of communication methods were used within the setting, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), Widgets, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and sign-language support.

The school additionally provides outreach support to other settings in the area in relation to communication and interaction. YP involved in the study ranged from 15 to 18 years old, with most attending the sixth form, except for one participant who was 15. School staff participants included Class Teachers and the Head of Sixth Form, while two carers also took part in the study.

10.0. Data Collection-Interviews

Participants were offered the choice of having their interviews conducted either face-to-face or online, as outlined in the recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) and the Participant Information Forms (see Appendices B). Six interviews were conducted face-to-face at the school with YP and school staff, while two interviews with carers were facilitated online via Microsoft Teams. As this research adopted a case study design within a single setting, interviews were organised into three groups to represent different experiences of ARMs. Each group consisted of one YP, one carer and one member of school staff who had all attended the same ARM. All participants were then interviewed individually using semi-structured questioning. To support YP in recalling their experiences, participants were required to have had their ARM within six months prior to data collection.

Interviews lasted up to 60 minutes, although the duration varied depending on participants' communication and interaction needs. For some YP, responses were scaffolded by a staff member through brief clarifying statements or the interpretation of non-verbal communication. The school also provided resources such as pupil-views sheets from the YP's ARM to support their understanding and help them respond to interview questions.

Interviews with YP focused on their experiences of how their views were elicited during their ARM and whether they felt included in the decision-making process. Questions explored their involvement in decisions about future education, employment goals and aspirations. In contrast, interviews with carers and school staff explored their perceptions of the annual review process, the tools used to elicit views and their perspectives on how YP's contributions were incorporated into decision-making. For further detail on the interviews and quotes used in this investigation, see Appendices C and F.

10.1. Ethical Considerations

During professional practice, TEPs and EPs are required to adhere to the ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). For this investigation, the researcher followed the principles outlined in the *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (BPS, 2021) and the *Code of Human Research Ethics* (BPS, 2021). These guidelines include key responsibilities such as obtaining informed consent (BPS, 4.1), ensuring participants are not placed at risk (BPS, 2.4) and maintaining participant anonymity (BPS, 2.1).

Prior to seeking university ethical approval, the researcher held an initial discussion with the area Senior Educational Psychologist at their placement local authority. This meeting aimed to determine whether the service would support the investigation—for example, through distributing recruitment materials and facilitating data collection—and whether the project aligned with local authority priorities. Once the Senior Educational Psychologist confirmed their support, the researcher submitted an ethics application to the UEA ethics board. Following approval, the researcher revisited discussions with the Senior Educational Psychologist, and permission was granted for the project to be facilitated within the placement local authority.

Additional ethical considerations were required during data collection. YP with EHCPs can be considered a vulnerable group due to the complexity of their SEN. As the participating YP attended a special school specialising in communication and interaction, it was anticipated that some individuals might require additional support during the interview process. To ensure participants felt safe and comfortable, YP were offered the option of having a familiar staff member present to support them in answering questions if they wished. YP were also given regular opportunities to take breaks, and informed consent was obtained from each participant before interviews commenced.

10.2. informed consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw

The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants before data collection commenced. Given the SEN of the YP involved, and the potential challenges they may face in understanding the project, adapted participant information sheets were provided once the school had agreed to facilitate the research. These sheets outlined the aims and goals of the investigation in an accessible format. Participants were also informed prior to the interviews that their identities would remain anonymous and that they retained the right to withdraw at any point during the interview or after data had been collected.

10.3. Debriefing

After completing the interviews, all participants were verbally debriefed about the investigation. They were given time to ask any questions and were provided with relevant signposting where appropriate. Participants were reassured that their identities would remain anonymous throughout the study. They were also directed to appropriate contacts should they require any further support following their participation.

10.4. Power considerations

In this investigation, it was considered that the researcher's gender and cultural background did not influence their ability to conduct interviews within the setting. However, careful attention was given to the researcher's dual role as both a postgraduate researcher at UEA and a TEP within an EPS in the Eastern Region. To minimise any potential role confusion or perceived power imbalance, the recruitment flyer and email clearly stated that the investigation was being conducted as part of a UEA research project rather than work commissioned by the local authority.

11.0. Data Analysis

The researcher interviewed carers, school staff and YP aged 15–18 to gain insight into their experiences of their ARM within their school. Participants were asked questions about how YP's views were elicited during their ARM, their experiences of school, their involvement in decision-making and their perspectives on how future ARMs could be made more inclusive. The research questions guiding the interviews were:

- How are children and young people's views elicited for their annual review meeting?

- How are young people's views included in the decision-making process for their transition to post-16 education or employment?
- How do young people and key stakeholders perceive the annual review meeting?
- What is the extent of external involvement (e.g., local authority) during annual review meetings?

These questions will be explored further within the discussion section of this paper.

Braun and Clarke (2022) describe Thematic Analysis (TA) as a "family of methods, not a singular method – there is no standardised TA," highlighting the flexibility of this approach. For this investigation, Braun and Clarke's (2017) original TA framework was selected to analyse interview transcripts, as TA allows researchers to work with data from multiple sources, identify patterns across a dataset and develop a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. While several forms of TA exist—including Reflexive Thematic Analysis, which incorporates researcher reflexivity throughout the analytic process (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

A central component of TA involves generating initial codes from the dataset and organising these into broader groups or subcodes, which can then be developed into themes. This was particularly suitable for the present research, as the annual review process comprises multiple stages, including eliciting CYP's views and facilitating meetings between school staff and parents. TA enabled the identification of shared themes across the experiences of YP, school staff and carers, supporting the collation of data within the context of a single case study.

Initially, before reviewing the dataset, I considered using a Semantic Analysis approach (Goddard, 2011) to generate pre-existing themes based on findings from the literature review. For example, previously identified barriers to YP attending meetings—such as issues relating to capacity, anxiety and limited involvement in decision-making—could have been used as predetermined categories. However, after examining the dataset and reflecting on my constructivist epistemological stance, it became clear that imposing pre-conceived themes would not accurately represent the lived realities of YP, school staff and carers. To avoid introducing bias and to remain aligned with a constructivist approach, themes were generated inductively after all interview transcripts had been reviewed.

Justification

Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2017) was selected over Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) because the original TA approach places greater emphasis on the data itself, whereas RTA focuses on the researcher's interpretative role and acknowledges the influence of researcher experiences during data analysis. TA aligned more closely with the aims of this study, as a focal point was to represent the views of YP, carers and school staff as faithfully as possible, without imposing a strong interpretative bias that might overshadow participants' voices—particularly given the limited detail provided by some YP during interviews. TA enabled me to remain closely aligned with the content of the data, rather than prioritising my ongoing reflections, assumptions or personal meaning-making, which would have been a central approach had a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) been used. As a central aim of this research was to highlight the voices of YP, the original form of TA was selected over RTA, as TA places greater emphasis on participants' accounts.

In addition, TA allowed for the identification of shared patterns across three participant groups, each of whom held differing perspectives on the ARM process. This was particularly important because the codes and themes generated through TA could contribute to developing a framework for how ARMs might be facilitated in England, especially within special school contexts. Broadbent and Cacciattolo (2009) demonstrated that case studies can highlight examples of good practice in schools, such as supporting YP to make informed decisions about their career pathways, which is directly relevant to ARMs as a mechanism for supporting post-16 transitions.

Furthermore, TA supported the development of a rich and coherent dataset drawn from interviews with YP, parents/carers and school staff, which was particularly important given the limited research available on ARMs in special school settings. TA also enabled a systematic exploration of the similarities and differences across participant groups, ensuring that the perspectives of YP, carers and school staff were all represented within the analysis. Given the varying levels of detail provided across interviews, and my commitment to presenting each group's views in a balanced and transparent manner, TA offered the most suitable and well-aligned analytic approach for this study. Given the aims of the study, a data-driven approach rather than reflexive was considered more appropriate. Braun and Clarke's (2017) TA framework consists of six phases:

1. Become familiar with the data
2. Generate initial codes
3. Search for themes
4. Review themes

5. Define themes
6. Produce the write-up

The following sections outline how these phases were applied within this investigation. Examples of coding can be found in Appendix E.

Thematic Analysis

The first step in TA involves reading and re-reading interview transcripts until the researcher becomes fully familiar with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2017). As outlined earlier in the report, interviews were recorded via Microsoft Teams, which provided built-in transcription. However, I also listened back to the audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. During transcription, I noted key participant quotes to support the later generation of themes (see Appendix E).

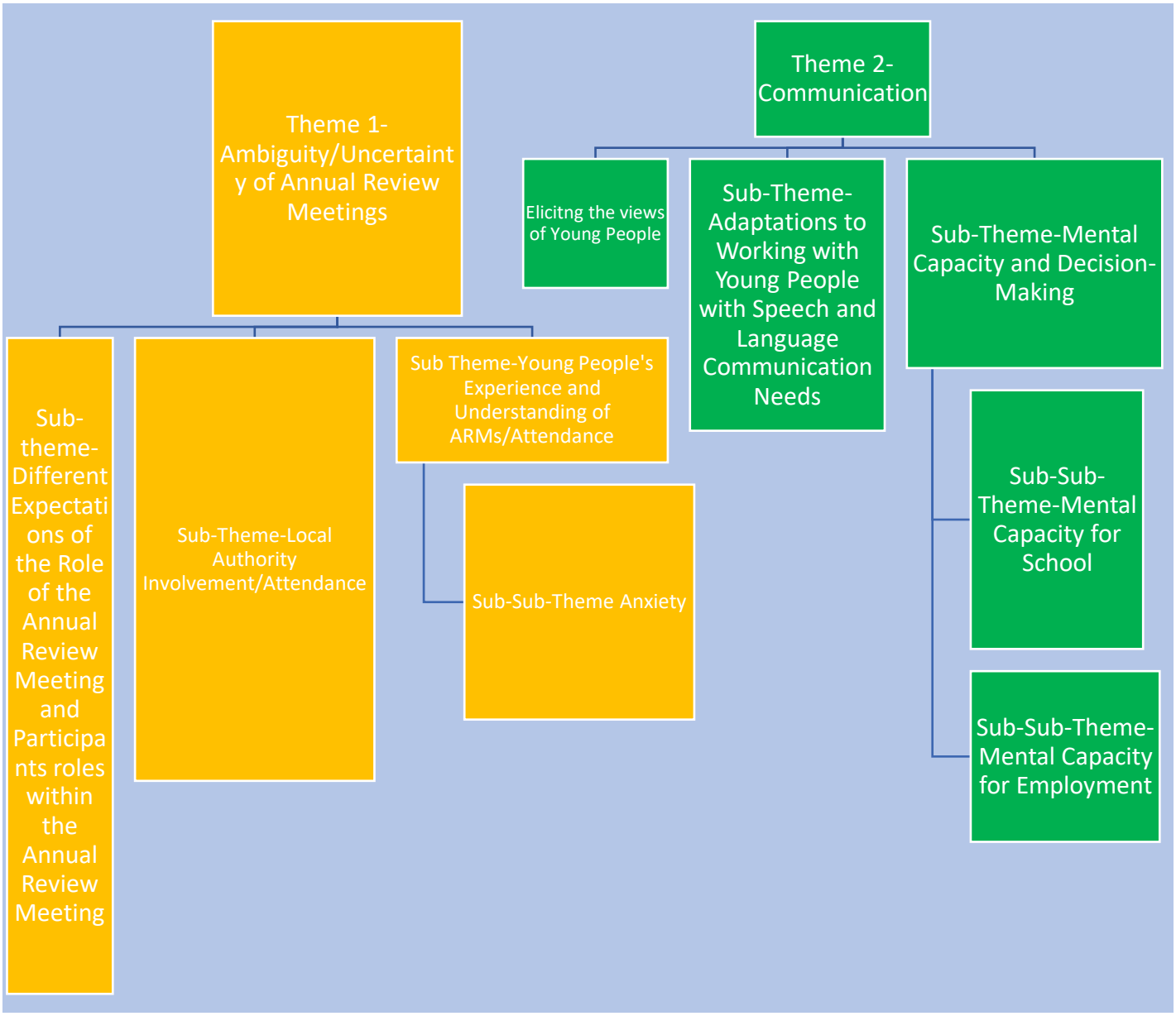
In the second step—generating initial codes—I organised the data in a meaningful and systematic way to begin making sense of the dataset. Codes were created by highlighting sections of text within the interview transcripts and assigning labels. I initially coded key quotes (see Appendix E) and stored these in Microsoft Word before returning to the full transcripts to complete line-by-line coding. Although I considered using Excel or other software to support coding, I chose to work in Microsoft Word, as this was the method I was most familiar with. In the third step—searching for themes—I began grouping related codes together, using my research questions as a guide. This process involved colour-coding text to identify patterns and develop initial themes.

The fourth step—reviewing themes—involved refining and organising the dataset into coherent themes that reflected the aims of the study, including exploring the annual review process, eliciting YP's views and understanding decision-making. I reviewed the initial themes and subthemes to ensure they aligned with the research questions. To support this process, I drew on guiding questions from Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) framework, including:

- *Do the themes make sense?*
- *Does the data support the themes?*
- *Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?*
- *Are there other themes within the data?*

In the fifth step—defining themes—I refined and labelled each theme and subtheme, clarifying how they related to one another and to the overall dataset. In the final step—writing up—I presented the themes as findings, which are outlined in the following section of the report.

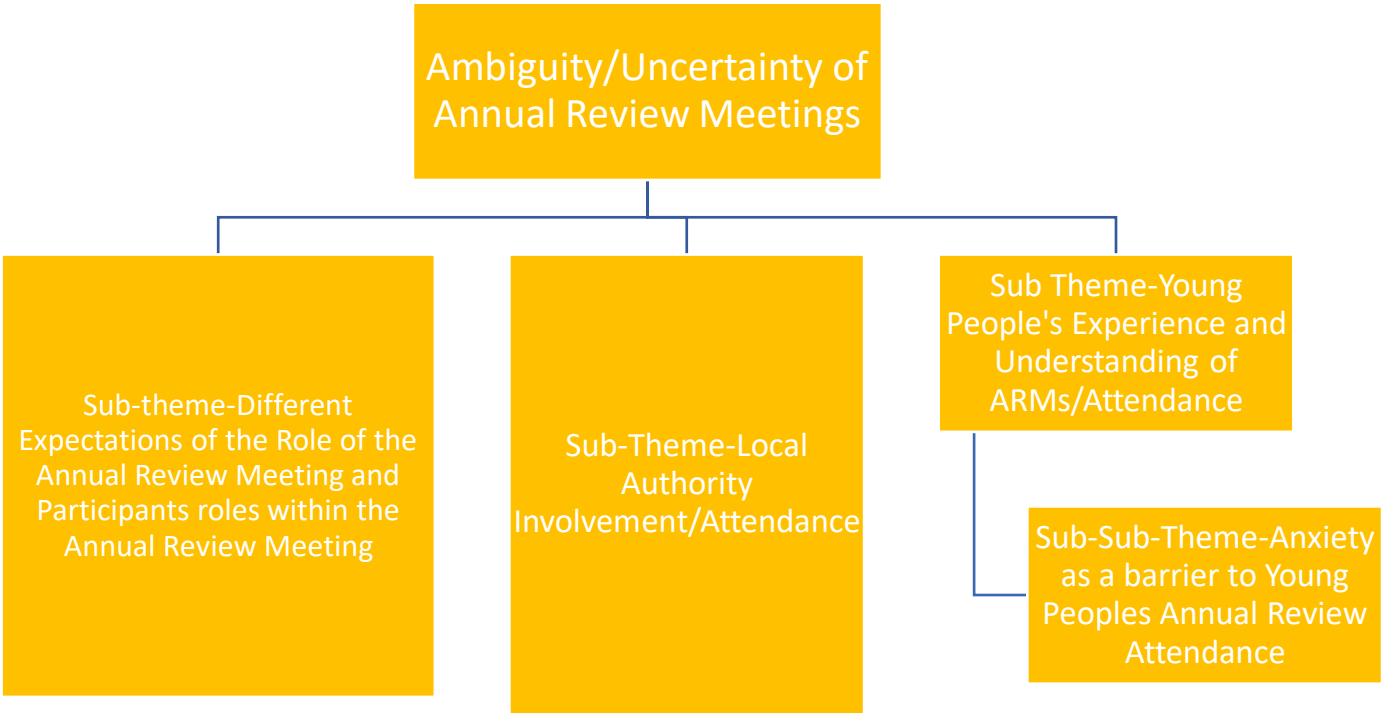
Figure 3.0. Overall Thematic Map



12.0. Theme 1: Ambiguity/Uncertainty of Annual Review Meetings

The first theme, *Ambiguity/Uncertainty*, reflects YP's, school staffs and parents'/carers' experiences of the role and function of the ARM. This theme captures individual factors such as how YP's views were elicited and the extent of their involvement in decision-making during the meeting. Interview findings also indicated that *Ambiguity/Uncertainty* was linked to ARMs being perceived as "informal." School staff and carers reported that local authority representatives rarely attended ARMs, instead prioritising social-care-focused meetings such as Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviews. This absence contributed to ARMs feeling less formal and, according to school staff, made them appear similar to other routine school-based meetings with parents, rather than distinct statutory processes.

Figure 4.0. Thematic Analysis for Theme 1.



12.1. Sub-Theme-Different Expectations of the Role of the Annual Review Meeting and Participants roles within the Annual Review Meeting

The primary sub-theme identified across the dataset concerned participants' differing understandings of the role of ARMs. Findings indicated considerable variation in how participants perceived the purpose and function of the meeting. For example, Jenny (carer of Jessy) described

the ARM as an opportunity to develop her understanding of the process and to gather information, particularly as this was the first ARM she had attended during the 2023/2024 academic year.

Jenny commented, "There's been a lot of changes with Jessy since January because I've found out that before January, she would hardly talk to anybody," and later added, "Obviously Jessy is still quite nonverbal about what's been happening, although she is getting better." These reflections suggest that the ARM provided Jenny with valuable insight into Jessy's experiences in her educational setting, as well as information about her communication and interaction needs. During the interview, Jenny also explained that she had only recently begun fostering Jessy and her sister in 2024, noting, *"I've only been caring for the two girls since January, so this was my first meeting."*

As noted earlier in this paper, the primary role of ARMs is to discuss the needs and progress of CYP (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015). However, findings from carers suggested that they also viewed these meetings as an opportunity to better understand their child's needs within the school setting and to receive updates on their progress. For example, Jenny reflected, *"I see her wonder and then noticing at school as well. So it was a very positive experience because they were just saying how nice it is that she's progressing."*

In contrast, interviews with school staff indicated that ARMs were often perceived as informal meetings, largely due to the absence of local authority representatives. As a result, ARMs were typically facilitated by school staff, with parents/carers and YP invited to attend. In some cases, this meant that staff relied heavily on their own professional expertise to lead the meeting. David (Class Teacher of Liam) explained, *"So in terms of running the meetings, because I'm the only game there, you know, my experience with them is governed by my competence, [and the] quality of the relationship with parents."* This suggests that positive relationships between stakeholders may be a key factor in facilitating a successful ARM.

Although the familiarity between parents and school staff could be viewed as a concern, this was reflected in Michael's (Class Teacher of Jamie) comment that *"Parent-teacher discussion seems a bit more informal"* despite reviewing Liam's EHCP during the meeting. David expressed a similar sentiment, describing Liam's most recent ARM as *"I think that at the moment all it is, it's another parent's evening for us. And I guess, and that's not really great, because annual review meetings are literally a statutory responsibility."* However, experiences were not consistent across participants. During Jessy's ARM, Jenny noted that social care were present, albeit virtually, stating, *"There was a social worker, but she was on Teams."*

12.2. Sub-Theme-Local Authority Involvement/Attendance

As noted in the previous section, the lack of local authority involvement was a concern among both staff and parents, contributing to ARMs being perceived as informal rather than statutory meetings intended to review a young person's EHCP. Staff reported that local authority representatives were consistently invited but rarely attended. As David commented, *"Health never turn up… They're always invited. So basically, its parent and school."* The absence of local authority staff also meant that information and changes discussed during the ARM were not always accurately reflected in the official documentation produced by the local authority.

David further explained, *"They [the local authority] develop the changes we recommended [but they] are never incorporated in the document,"* and added, *"So we end up with a document that's out of date… whilst the learner is continuing within a single school, that's not the hugest problem… but when the learner transitions that document… that's the legal document. So that's probably the problem."* This aligns with Michael's perspective, who noted that some aspects of the EHCP fall outside the school's control: *"There are changes within this document that are out of the school's control… especially if they're social care or budgeting finance and they have to be there to instigate that."* He also highlighted that the plan can become overly education-focused in the absence of wider multi-agency input.

Carers' accounts corroborated these concerns. Melissa recalled, *"There were two teachers… it's school staff and another lady,"* while Jenny described Jessy's ARM as involving *"her [Amy – Head of Sixth Form], a teacher and one of the teaching assistants… myself… and the support lady who oversees a lot of the pastoral support."* Both accounts indicate that ARMs were facilitated almost exclusively by school staff, with no local authority attendance. These findings suggest that, despite schools facilitating ARMs, the lack of local authority involvement limited collaboration on key aspects such as budgeting, finance and transition planning. This reflects the literature, which highlights that local authorities are often perceived as the final decision-makers, even when they are not present during the review process.

Although local authority staff are invited to ARMs, wider evidence indicates significant staffing shortages across health and social care (Ofsted, 2022; Shemtob, Asanti, Pahl & Majeed, 2023). Reduced capacity may therefore contribute to their limited attendance, reinforcing perceptions of ARMs as informal or equivalent to routine parent–teacher meetings. As David noted, *"It would be helpful if there was more representation from the local authority… especially for leavers… Social*

Workers and PFAL workers need to be more present. Because it then makes it more formal." This suggests that increased local authority presence may enhance the perceived legitimacy and statutory nature of ARMs.

However, participants also reported that local authority staff were more likely to attend other meetings, such as Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviews, particularly for Looked After Children (Hayden, 2005). Melissa explained, *"To be honest, the Social Workers usually just come to the PEP meetings,"* and noted that they also attended other child-centred meetings such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessments.

These accounts indicate that, due to the overlap in purpose between ARMs and other statutory meetings, local authority staff may prioritise PEPs or PIP-related meetings over ARMs, even though both are statutory responsibilities. Melissa reflected, *"It's not dissimilar to the EHCP to be honest… it's just a review making sure he's met targets… making sure everyone's doing the best they can for him."* Similarly, Jenny observed, *"The social workers or the local authority get more involved in that [PEP] than they do… in my experience… the EHCP."* Melissa further confirmed, *"They attend PIPs and PEPs meetings."*

When discussing how local authority involvement could be improved, carers and staff highlighted the role of need and capacity. Melissa commented, *"I'm sure a lot of social workers would probably love to attend more meetings, but have they got the capacity?"* Amy added, *"For some of our students… some other less able students… they need more social care… and it's only the AP field worker that can organise that. So the more they spend getting to know that student, the better the outcome… I wish that was happening."*

12.3.Sub-Theme-Young People's Experience and Understanding of ARMs/Attendance

This theme explores YP's perceptions and understanding of ARMs during interviews. During data analysis, it became evident that YP often did not fully understand the *scope* or overall purpose of the ARM process. This may be partly due to the multi-stage nature of ARMs, which involve eliciting CYP's views prior to the meeting and then facilitating a multi-agency discussion with parents, school staff and, where possible, local authority representatives. It can also be inferred that this limited understanding may relate to the capacity and needs of the participants, who were all aged 15–18 and had EHCPs alongside complex communication and interaction needs. Supporting YP to understand and communicate their views—particularly their communication preferences in the lead-up to the ARM—was identified as important by staff.

Amy (Head of Sixth Form) explained, *"I usually sit and do personal profile with them,"* and added, *"So I'll get up and sit with her and ask questions and give her options… it's what you like about school,"* describing how she supported YP to articulate their views for the meeting.
However, staff and carers noted that when YP were asked unfamiliar or abstract questions—such as the researcher's question about *how future ARMs could be more inclusive*—they often struggled to understand or respond. Jenny, referring to Jessy, stated, *"But she won't ask you a question about something she doesn't know… it's not in her realm of what's going on in her life."*

Similarly, David highlighted the challenges YP faced when asked to engage with conceptual language: *"It's very hard because our learners generally experience the world through their immediate sensory experiences… as soon as you start talking about conceptual stuff… what comes next… well, I'm in now, you're scuppered."*

Despite these challenges, staff and parents reported that YP did understand that their views were important for decision-making. For example, Jessy was able to express a clear preference about her post-16 pathway. As Amy (Head of Sixth Form) described, *"Jessy had to make a big decision… stay here for one more year or go to college early… you had a chat with Melissa… and what did you decide? You said that I'm going to stay here."*

These findings align with evidence from Farmer and Stringer (2023), who examined person-centred meetings for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Their study found that while children could express preferences, they experienced difficulties communicating views about more complex aspects of their lives, such as health, disability and medical needs. This mirrors the experiences reported by staff and carers in the present investigation, suggesting that YP may understand and communicate immediate preferences but find it more challenging to engage with broader or more abstract aspects of the ARM process.

12.3.1 Sub-Sub-Theme-Anxiety as a barrier to Young People's Annual Review Attendance

Within the dataset, anxiety emerged as a prevalent theme influencing YP's non-attendance at their ARMs. School staff, parents and the young people themselves confirmed that YP were invited to their meetings; however, all reported that anxiety prevented them from attending. A key factor contributing to this anxiety was the number of people present. As Jenny explained, *"Try and keep it as less as possible,"* noting that Jessy's ARM was a hybrid meeting (in person and online), which left her feeling overwhelmed and confused due to the number of attendees.

Jenny also highlighted that the presence of unfamiliar professionals increased Jessy's anxiety: *"And Teams one if there's a social worker she doesn't know, or maybe there's a LD nurse she doesn't know very well… she just doesn't want to talk in front of [them]… she kind of shuts off."* Similarly, Melissa expressed concern that Jamie could become overwhelmed if directly involved in his ARM, stating, *"If he's too involved, it's just too much. He doesn't need to be worrying about whether he's allowed to stay where he is."* David (Liam's Class Teacher) echoed this, explaining, *"At the annual review meeting, his carer would prefer that… he might get a little bit anxious seeing him at school."*

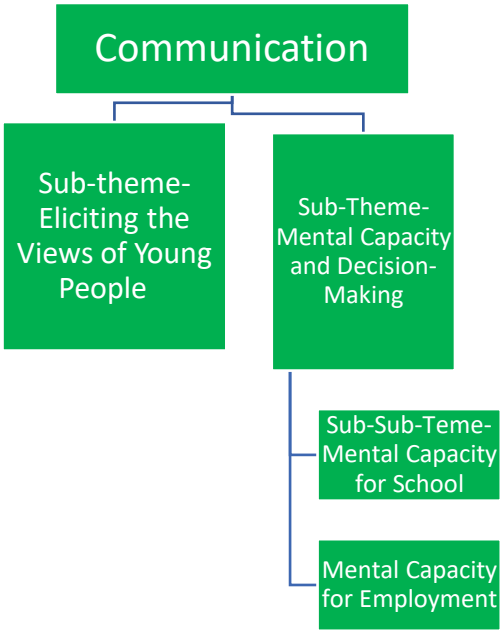
Despite these challenges, some YP were able to suggest strategies that might reduce their anxiety. Jessy proposed having *"a sort of snack"* and suggested *"put it in another student or staff,"* indicating that familiar peers or trusted adults might help her feel more comfortable. This aligns with Jenny's view that *"just having people there that she trusts"* would support Jessy's participation. These responses can be interpreted through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), particularly the categories of physiological needs, safety, and belongingness. Jessy's suggestions may reflect a desire for comfort (food), security (trusted adults) and relational support (familiar peers) to alleviate anxiety during the ARM.

Melissa further noted that attention and sensory demands also contributed to YP's anxiety, stating, *"I'm not sure… we could invite him along, but he's got a very short attention span… when there's a group of people… he struggles with that… he finds it even harder to focus."* This highlights the interaction between cognitive load, sensory processing and emotional regulation in shaping YP's capacity to participate in ARMs (Preece & Jordan, 2010).

13.0. Theme 2: Communication

An overarching theme identified across interviews with YP, carers and school staff was *Communication*. Within this theme, communication referred to the tools and processes used to elicit YP's views in ways that were responsive to their speech, language and communication needs. It also encompassed the adaptations made by school staff to support YP in understanding the purpose of their ARM and ensuring their views were meaningfully included in decision-making during the annual review process. The sub-themes below present key quotes and findings from YP, carers and school staff relating to *Communication*.

Figure 5.0. Thematic Map for Communication



13.1. Sub-Theme-Eliciting the Views of Young People

During the interviews, YP were given opportunities to write their responses or speak, but they consistently preferred to answer questions verbally with scaffolding from school staff. YP were also provided with a printed copy of their *Personal Profile* and an additional sheet containing their pupil views to help remind them of the content discussed during their ARM.

The primary sub-theme within *Communication* concerned the ways in which YP's views were elicited for their ARM. Across interviews with YP, school staff and carers, participants described a range of tools used to support this process, including visuals, unstructured conversations and the creation or updating of a *Personal Profile*. Staff emphasised that eliciting YP's views required adaptations tailored to their communication and interaction needs, as all participants had EHCPs.

This often featured pupils working alongside staff to update their *Personal Profiles*, which function similarly to one-page profiles. Jamie and Michael explained that the profile includes information such as, *"I've seen this for a while, but let's see if we look at photos of favourite things you've done… what makes me happy, what I'm good at and how I want to be supported… shall we give this to you? What makes me happy?"*

Michael further corroborated this approach, stating, *"So in sixth form, our students are involved in their 'Personal Profile'… that involves them telling us what their main motives are, what they like, what they dislike."* This suggests that YP played an active role in shaping the content of their profiles. Staff also described reasonable adjustments used to support communication, including

sign language and assistive technology. Jamie and Michael recalled examples such as, *"School staff member helps with the electronical device that helps you hear her talk better… laptops and writing things,"* and *"Sometimes a member of staff will sit and help you do your work… we do signs of the week… we learn new signs each week."* Staff also made clear to YP that their views would be shared during the ARM. As Michael explained, *"Should we have a look? We've got a personal profile… which comes with you to the review, doesn't it?"*

Both YP and staff described the process of eliciting pupil views as collaborative. Jamie commented, *"We all help each other all the time,"* when reflecting on how his views were gathered. Michael provided further insight into this collaborative approach: *"He will sit alongside me when I'm doing the form… I will read the questions… support him and explain it simply so he understands and so he can answer… Jamie was able to tell me who he lives with… who his friends are."* Staff noted that this information was then incorporated into the paperwork prior to the ARM.
Another strategy identified by staff was collecting YP's views over an extended period to ensure an accurate and authentic representation. David explained, *"I think the main adjustment for this learner is time and space and not feeling put on the spot… when I say time and space, I'm talking about weeks, not an extra 10 minutes."*

Carers also highlighted that YP's views were often collected individually to ensure they felt safe and secure—an important consideration given the anxiety discussed in earlier themes. Melissa noted, *"As I understand it… they do it on a one-to-one basis, which Jamie copes with a lot better… they did [it] quite relaxed, not too formal… he wouldn't respond well to that… it's just more having a chat about what his aspirations [are]."* This referred to discussions about Jamie's future goals, such as his aspiration to become a policeman.

13.1.2 Sub-Theme-Adaptations to Working with Young People with Speech and Language Communication Needs

As noted within the context of the setting and participant characteristics, all YP had speech and language needs associated with their communication and interaction, which could present barriers to eliciting their views without appropriate adaptations. Carers described how such adaptations supported communication. Melissa explained, *"It's usually done in pictures because that's his better way of communication."* This aligns with Jenny's account, in which she highlighted the use of pictorial tools such as Widget, asking, *"Do you know the Widget programme?"* and adding, *"It's usually done around that sort of format."* Jenny further described how Widgets were integral to

creating Jessy's *Personal Profile*, stating, *"We made one of these… we do a personal profile and we do views. We asked Jessy if she wants to come to the meeting and stay."*

These adaptations were valued by carers, who felt they enabled their child's views to be represented accurately during the ARM. Jenny commented, *"And with Jessy, although she's getting more verbal, it's the cards… happy feelings… the emoji-type things… happy, sad, OK, thumbs up… with anything with Jessy, you have to use every tool you can."* She added, *"To get the right answer, I use that at home as well… we've got happy emotion stickers… we've got sad,"* suggesting that visuals were an effective tool for supporting Jessy's emotional literacy.

Carers also expressed appreciation for the school's efforts to promote YP's independence by helping them develop methods to communicate their views. Jenny reflected, *"I think the change of teachers and the way Eastern Region school do things… they really do promote independence. That is their biggest thing and a remarkable job within."* This aligns with Michael's comment that *"Jamie was involved in pupils' views,"* indicating that YP were supported to contribute meaningfully to the annual review process.

However, in Jessy's case, while visuals and informal conversations supported communication, Jenny noted that she still needed to advocate for Jessy to encourage her independence. She explained, *"Sometimes she might text me and she'll say I need to talk to you… we'll go and find somewhere quietly… but I'm trying to be an advocate for her as well as getting her to speak up for herself."*

School staff also discussed the importance of simplifying questions to ensure YP could understand and respond accurately. Michael commented, *"Well, I'm just simplifying it more to his cognitive understanding."* He described using modelling and reframing to support comprehension, for example: *"So it might have been, 'Well, I don't know what to do when I'm older.' 'Yeah, yeah… what are you interested in?'"* This approach enabled pupils to express their views more clearly. As Michael recalled, *"I think in the end he said, 'I want to be a policeman.' 'Why do you want to be?' And he's like, 'Well, I like the uniform… I like helping people… I like talking to people.'"* Jamie corroborated this during the interview by nodding to confirm his aspiration to become a policeman.

13.2. Sub-Theme-Mental Capacity and Decision-Making

As outlined in the literature review, CYP with SEN may experience difficulties with cognitive functioning, which can affect their ability to understand and respond to questions. Within this theme, *mental capacity* refers to YP's ability to make decisions and express preferences relevant to their ARM.

A consistent finding across participant responses was that YP were able to articulate their goals and aspirations, which supported decision-making during the ARM process. As noted in the earlier sub-theme on *Eliciting Young People's Views*, Jamie was able to express a clear aspiration to become a policeman. This led staff and carers to explore opportunities aligned with his interests. Melissa explained, *"So his social worker, actually, she's off sick at the moment, so I don't know if it's going to happen, but she had offered her husband who is a policeman… they had offered to take him around the Eastern Region police station for a little tour and to meet some of the guys. So that may be happening."*

However, Melissa also acknowledged that due to Jamie's needs, including his mental capacity, he might not be able to access the work experience placement. Staff further commented that some YP experience the world primarily through immediate sensory input, which can make it challenging for them to respond to questions that lack concrete or visual reference points. David described this difficulty, stating, *"It's very hard because our learners generally experience the world through their immediate sensory experiences. And as soon as you start talking about conceptual stuff—and time is inherently conceptual—yeah, as soon as you start talking about what comes next… well, I'm in now, you're scuppered."* This highlights the importance of focusing questions in the present moment and using visual or tangible supports to facilitate understanding.

13.2.1. Sub-Sub Theme Mental Capacity for School

Findings from interviews with YP and staff highlighted that YP were often adamant about wanting to remain in their current school setting, largely due to the relationships they had developed with peers. Jessy, for example, was offered the opportunity to attend a college in a different setting; however, Jenny explained, *"Yeah, it's very she wants to be with her friends. And the fact that she's just… I don't think she's just ready to go to college yet."*

Similarly, Melissa described Jamie as *"happy and content where he is, which he clearly is… and he can vocalise that."* This aligned with Jamie's own responses, as he gave a thumbs-up when asked about his experience of school. Melissa further noted that, *"With Jamie, he has already visited one of the local colleges… he's already involved in that process… his voice is listened to about which college he prefers and why."*

YP also demonstrated the capacity to discuss their preferences for future educational settings, particularly when preparing for their ARM. Michael explained, *"So I think essentially for him, yeah, in the review, it was like the next step for Jamie is to move to college."* He added, *"As I said, Jamie has visited the colleges… he's expressed what he liked about one, what he liked about the other… what was his favourite."* This suggests that YP were able to express preferences based on concrete, observable features of a college environment—such as its physical appearance—but were less able to provide more abstract or detailed reasoning beyond this level.

In contrast, Liam expressed a strong preference for a work-based pathway rather than further education. He stated that he wanted to enter employment after leaving school and identified working in a supermarket as his preferred option. This indicates that while YP varied in the specificity and depth of their reasoning, they were nonetheless able to articulate clear preferences regarding their future pathways.

13.2.2. Sub-sub theme Mental Capacity for Employment

Carers also highlighted that, in addition to decision-making within the ARM, YP aged 16 and over were required to undergo mental capacity assessments relating to the management of finances as part of their transition to adulthood. Melissa explained that Jamie, for example, *"has had mental capacity tests on for finance… and it's been proved that, actually, he doesn't have the capacity to do that."* This assessment was carried out by a Preparing for Adulthood Life Worker (PFAL), who evaluated Jamie's ability to make financial decisions.

Melissa further described the process, stating, *"As his PFA file work that's been taken over and Jamie was involved and was told that Jamie's money would be looked after. And he very much knew that he would ask his parents. And it became clear that Jamie doesn't have an understanding of money concepts in real contextual terms."* Despite this, she noted that Jamie was comfortable consenting to his parents and carers managing his finances, suggesting that he was able to identify trusted individuals to make decisions on his behalf. As Melissa commented, *"But he was happy for consent to be given for something."* In addition, prior to the interviews for

this study, all YP were asked for their informal consent to participate, and all responded *"yes"*, indicating their willingness to take part.

Discussion

14.0. Introduction

This research project aimed to address four research questions: how YP's views were elicited for their ARM (Research Question 1); how they were included in decision-making when transitioning to post-16 education or employment (Research Question 2); the perceptions of YP, parents/carers and school staff regarding ARMs (Research Question 3); and the extent of local authority involvement during ARMs (Research Question 4). These questions were informed by evidence in the literature indicating that YP are not consistently included in decision-making processes (e.g. Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020). This aligns with findings from Foskett, Dyke and Maringe (2008), who reported that YP were rarely the final decision-makers when planning their post-16 transitions; instead, decisions were typically shaped by school staff, parents or the local authority. However, more recent evidence (Ganoa, Castro & Palikara, 2020) suggests that YP *can* make meaningful decisions about their post-16 pathways when appropriately supported.

This investigation also contributes to two underrepresented areas in both research and Educational Psychology practice: post-16 transitions and eliciting the views of YP in special schools (e.g. Morris & Atkinson, 2018; Allen, Milne, Velija & Radley, 2024). Given that eliciting YP's views is a core aspect of EP practice (Williamson, 2022), and that the literature on ARMs contains limited exploration of YP's experiences in special school contexts—despite rising national demand for such placements—an investigation into ARMs for this population was warranted.
A qualitative case study approach was employed to identify common themes across the perceptions of YP, school staff and carers during three ARMs. Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2017) thematic analysis. This discussion chapter provides an interpretation of the findings in relation to each research question.

The chapter also considers the implications of the findings for:

- Eliciting the views of YP with communication and interaction needs
- Supporting YP transitioning to post-16 education or employment
- Understanding the role and function of the Annual Review Meeting
- Applying relevant psychological theory
- Kdentifying study limitations and directions for future research

- Informing future professional practice

The section concludes by drawing together the central findings presented across the thesis.

15.0-Research question 1- How are Young People's Views elicited for their annual review meeting?

Group 1 – Jamie (YP) / Melissa (Carer) / Michael (Class Teacher)

Jamie (17 years old) did not attend his ARM. Evidence from interviews suggested that attending the meeting would have been challenging for him, as he had been assessed by a Preparing for Adulthood Life Worker (PFAL) as lacking the capacity to make certain significant decisions, such as those relating to finances. These decisions were therefore facilitated by his carers, with Jamie's consent. This aligns with evidence in the literature indicating that CYP with SEN may experience difficulties relating to mental capacity, resulting in decision-making being supported by parents, carers or school staff (Mental Capacity Act, 2005; Murrell & McCalla, 2016; Vandesande, van Keer, Dhondt & Maes, 2022).

Regarding how Jamie's views were elicited for his ARM, interview data indicated that a range of communication methods were used within a single session, including sign language (Reward, Musengi & Runo, 2024) and informal conversations combining speech and signing. These approaches reflected a *Total Communication* framework, an integrated method that utilises speech, symbols, electronic devices, sign language and visuals to support pupils with communication needs such as Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) and Specific Language Impairment (SLI) (Ferguson, Hall, Riley & Moore, 2010).

Total Communication approaches can reduce frustration by providing alternatives to speech (Ferguson et al., 2010), and align with the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015), which encourages the use of alternative communication tools to elicit CYP's views. The information gathered through these methods informed Jamie's *Personal Profile*, which was subsequently used to support decision-making during his ARM.

Group 2 – Jessy (YP) / Jenny (Carer) / Amy (Head of Sixth Form)

Jessy (18 years old) also did not attend her ARM. Similar to Jamie, her views were elicited through a single interaction with Amy, during which a *Personal Profile* was created. Visual tools and verbal conversations were used to support Jessy in expressing her views. This approach mirrored communication strategies used at home, where Jenny reported that although Jessy is becoming

more confident verbally, visual tools such as Widgets remain her preferred method of communication.

Group 3 – Liam (YP) / David (Class Teacher)

Liam (15 years old) was not present at his ARM. As with Jamie, a combination of sign language and speech was used to elicit his views for inclusion in his *Personal Profile*. David described Liam as *"having some speech,"* which required adaptations to ensure his views were captured accurately. Unlike the other cases, Liam's views were collected over a longer period—approximately two to three weeks—reflecting David's preferred approach to eliciting pupil views. These conversations took place informally and across different settings within the school to ensure the process felt natural rather than formal, a point explored further in a later section.

15.1 Overall Response to Research Question 1

Across all three groups, the collective findings indicated a consistent approach to eliciting YP's views through the use of the Personal Profile, supplemented by additional pupil-voice materials. Within this setting, the Personal Profile is used school-wide and functions similarly to a one-page profile, which typically outlines key information required to support CYP in their educational environment. However, in this context, the profile had been adapted to include information relevant to the YP's transition to adulthood. This structured approach to gathering information reflects a move beyond tokenistic consultation and aligns with the mid-levels of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, where adults actively seek out YP's perspectives and incorporate them into decision-making processes.

Alongside the Personal Profile, staff employed a range of procedures to gather pupil views. For example, David preferred to collect views over an extended period, whereas others elicited views during a single interaction as part of the annual review process. These differences reflected staff adaptations to meet the diverse needs of YP, with methods tailored to each individual's level of understanding and communication profile. This included the use of speech, visuals, sign language and other communication supports. Such personalised adaptations suggest practice situated around Hart's (1992) "adult-initiated, shared decisions with children" level, where adults design the process but intentionally create space for YP to express preferences in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them.

A further theme identified across interviews was the significance of pre-existing relationships between staff and YP. These relationships appeared to foster comfort and trust, enabling YP to

share their views more openly. YP were aware that staff would adjust their communication methods to suit their preferences, which aligns with relational approaches in schools that emphasise nurturing, empathetic relationships to promote feelings of safety, security and belonging (Baker, Bridger, Terry & Winsor, 2019).

Within Hart's (1992) framework, this relational foundation can be understood as a necessary precursor for movement towards higher levels of participation, as genuine collaboration depends on YP feeling safe, respected and confident that their contributions will be taken seriously. Examples of this included staff using alternative communication tools and David eliciting Liam's views through informal conversations across different school contexts, illustrating how participation was embedded in everyday interactions rather than confined to formal review meetings.

It is important to note that although YP were not always able to articulate detailed explanations about how or why their views were elicited for the ARM, they consistently recalled discussing their goals and aspirations. This suggests that, while the process remained largely adult-initiated, YP were supported to contribute meaningfully to discussions about their futures—again resonating with the middle levels of Hart's (1992) Ladder, where children's views are actively sought and influence planning, even if they are not yet fully leading the process. These aspects of pupil voice will be explored further in the following research question.

15.2. Research question 2- How are young people's views included in the decision-making process for their transition to post-16 education or employment?

Group 1 – Jamie / Melissa / Michael

Across interviews for Jamie's case, his views regarding his post-16 transition centred on gaining employment in the future, specifically his aspiration to become a policeman. As outlined in the previous section, these views were recorded on his *Personal Profile* and used to represent his wishes at his ARM. Although Jamie did not attend the meeting, Melissa and Michael explained that they had begun preparing work-related opportunities aligned with his interests. Melissa reported that arrangements were being explored for Jamie to undertake work experience at a local police station.

In terms of education, Jamie expressed a desire to develop life skills, which led to him visiting local colleges to identify courses that could support this pathway. These visits formed part of the school's efforts to ensure his views were meaningfully incorporated into transition planning.

Group 2 – Jessy / Jenny / Amy

According to the interviews, Jessy does not yet have a clearly defined post-16 career goal, although she has shown an interest in hairstyling. Her decision-making for the ARM was primarily shaped by her developing independence. Both Jenny and Amy described how Jessy has become increasingly confident in using speech to communicate with staff and her carer, despite previously relying on visual tools such as Widgets. This was evident during the interview, where she responded verbally to all questions.

Regarding how her views were included in decision-making, Jessy informed staff and her carer that she wished to remain in her current setting for an additional year. She attributed this to increased confidence and a sense of belonging, describing how she had begun *"getting out of her sister's shadow."* This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as Jessy demonstrated autonomy by making a choice based on her past experiences and her desire to continue developing independence within a familiar environment. Her preference was discussed at the ARM, and both school staff and her carer agreed that she should remain for another year, with plans to revisit discussions about college and employment in the following academic year.

Group 3 – Liam / David

At Liam's ARM, he expressed a clear desire to enter employment in the future, specifically working in a grocery shop. To support this pathway, the school planned to arrange work experience opportunities for the next academic year, and this was discussed during the meeting. In the interview, Liam indicated that he felt included in the decision-making process regarding both employment and attending college.

David, his class teacher, highlighted that many YP in this setting experience the world primarily through sensory engagement. To support their development, the school provides opportunities such as drama trips to help prepare them for future employment, education and community participation. This reflects psychosocial approaches (Taylor & McAvoy, 2014), which emphasise the role of social and cultural environments in shaping individual development. Interviews also indicated that Liam had visited local colleges to explore alternative pathways as part of his transition planning.

15.3. Overall Response to Research Question 2

Across all interviews, the data suggested that YP played a decisive role in shaping their transition to post-16 education or employment. School staff either arranged work-experience opportunities or supported YP to remain in their current setting, depending on the aspirations the YP expressed. These practices align with Hart's (1992) model of participation, indicating that YP's involvement in the annual review process extended beyond tokenistic consultation and reflected a more collaborative approach. In particular, staff actions correspond to the middle and upper levels of Hart's Ladder, where adults initiate processes but decisions are shared with young people, and their contributions directly influence planning. Staff actively "honoured" YP's views by taking concrete steps to prepare for and support their preferred future pathways.

This collaborative ethos mirrors participatory research methods with YP, such as Giles and Rowley's (2020) study, in which young people co-constructed materials—in their case, a video with EPs. In the present study, YP co-constructed their Personal Profile with school staff, using it as a central tool for representing their views at the ARM. This co-construction reflects participation at a level where YP's perspectives shape both the content and purpose of the materials used to support decision-making. These findings also align with research by Gaona, Palikara and Castro (2018), which demonstrated that YP can be at the forefront of decision-making when planning their post-16 transitions.

The current study further suggests that YP do not necessarily need to be physically present at their ARM for their views to be meaningfully included, provided that their perspectives are elicited through familiar and accessible methods—such as the Personal Profile—and supported by appropriate adaptations within the school setting. This contrasts with findings from Gaona, Castro and Palikara (2020), where YP's participation in ARMs was inconsistently facilitated; some were present at meetings but had limited or no active involvement. In terms of Hart's (1992) Ladder, this highlights that physical presence from a practitioner alone does not equate to participation at higher levels; meaningful involvement depends on whether YP's views genuinely shape decisions.

The findings also resonate with Merrick's (2020) work, which identified "conversations with CYP in real time as and when issues arise" as the most effective strategy for eliciting pupil views. This was reflected in David's approach to gathering Liam's views over two to three weeks through informal conversations across different school environments, ensuring that the process felt natural and responsive rather than formal or pressured. Such relational and iterative practices support

movement towards higher levels of participation, where YP's contributions are embedded in ongoing dialogue rather than confined to a single event.

15.4. Research Question 3-How do young people and key stakeholders perceive the annual review meeting?

Group 1 – Jamie / Melissa / Michael

In relation to how Jamie, Melissa and Michael perceived the ARM, interview data indicated that Jamie did not understand what an ARM was, although he was able to answer questions that informed decision-making for the meeting, such as his post-16 goals and aspirations. Melissa, his carer, perceived the ARM as *"not too dissimilar to the PEP meeting,"* noting that both meetings focused on discussing targets and monitoring Jamie's progress. Michael described the ARM as an informal process, largely because the meetings typically involved only himself and Jamie's parents/carers. However, he noted that the introduction of a checklist made the process feel more "*formal."*

Group 2 – Jessy / Jenny / Amy

Although Jessy did not attend her ARM, she had previously attempted to do so but felt overwhelmed by the hybrid format, which involved both face-to-face and online attendees, including unfamiliar adults. This contributed to her anxiety and decision not to participate. Despite this, she expressed that having a friend present and access to snacks would help her feel more comfortable attending future ARMs.

Jenny, who had recently taken over the care of Jessy and her sister, explained that this was the first ARM she had attended. She perceived the meeting as an opportunity to develop her understanding of the ARM process and to discuss communication strategies with school staff. Her perspective reflected both a learning experience and a collaborative engagement with the school.

Group 3 – Liam / David

For Liam and David, the ARM was similarly perceived as *"informal,"* echoing the perceptions in Group 1. Meetings were typically attended only by parents/carers and a member of school staff, with no representatives from the local authority present. As a result, the ARM was often experienced as comparable to a "parents' evening," rather than a multi-agency review.

15.5. Overall Response to this Research Question

Across all interviews, most YP understood that contributing their views to the Personal Profile formed part of the annual review process. This understanding appeared to stem from the trusting relationships they had developed with staff, supported by adapted communication methods, psychosocial approaches and, in some cases, the eliciting of views over time. These relational and communicative supports reflect movement towards the middle levels of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, where adults initiate processes but actively encourage YP to contribute their perspectives in meaningful ways. However, despite these supportive strategies, YP were generally unfamiliar with the broader purpose of an ARM. This may be attributed to their non-attendance—some YP felt overwhelmed by the meeting environment, while others were unable to attend due to issues relating to mental capacity.

These factors likely contributed to YP having limited or no opinions about ARMs themselves, as they were not present to experience the process. In terms of Hart's model, this absence restricted opportunities for YP to progress towards higher levels of participation, where they would be more directly involved in shared decision-making. For carers, ARMs were perceived as informative, particularly for those attending for the first time, and were valued as an opportunity to update their understanding of their child's progress. Carers also viewed the annual review as a useful space to discuss communication strategies and future planning. In contrast, school staff tended to perceive the ARM as a relatively informal process, largely due to the absence of local authority representatives—an issue explored further in the following section.

15.6 Research Question 4-What is the extent of external involvement, i.e., local authority, during annual review meetings?

Group 1 – Jamie / Melissa / Michael

In Jamie's case, the local authority did not attend his ARM. Michael explained that this was consistent with his wider experience of facilitating ARMs: although the local authority was invited, they typically did not attend. He noted that their absence contributed to the ARM being perceived as informal, resembling *"another meeting with parents"* rather than a statutory process that must occur annually (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015). However, Melissa highlighted that the local authority *did* attend Jamie's PEP meetings. She described the PEP and ARM as not *"dissimilar,"* as both focused on reviewing Jamie's progress and discussing targets

within his setting. This contrast suggests that local authority involvement appeared to depend more on the type of meeting than on the needs of the young person.

Group 2 – Jessy / Jenny / Amy

Local authority staff were also absent during Jessy's ARM. Jenny and Amy reported that, in previous years, Jessy had experienced hybrid meetings in which social workers attended virtually while school staff were present in person. However, this format contributed to Jessy feeling overwhelmed by the number of adults involved—both familiar and unfamiliar—which ultimately led to her not attending the meeting. This illustrates how the *mode* of local authority involvement can inadvertently create barriers to YP participation, particularly for those with communication and interaction needs.

Group 3 – Liam / David

Similarly, the local authority did not attend Liam's ARM and had historically been absent from these meetings. Unlike Jamie and Jessy, Liam is not a child in care and therefore does not have PEP meetings, which may partly explain the reduced contact with local authority professionals. David described the local authority as *"gatekeepers for the paperwork,"* referring to discrepancies between the changes recommended by the school during the ARM and the amendments ultimately made to the EHCP. This sometimes resulted in the EHCP being perceived as *"out of date."* David expressed concern about this, noting that EHCPs are transferable legal documents, and inaccuracies or outdated information could negatively affect key decisions, including discussions about a YP's transition to education or employment.

15.7 Overall Response to this Research Question

Across all groups, the local authority was not involved during ARMs, whereas they were consistently present for PEP meetings. This pattern suggests that, for YP in care, a more centralised or streamlined meeting—integrating elements of both ARMs and PEPs—could facilitate local authority involvement, particularly given that participants perceived the two meetings as similar in purpose. Such an approach would resemble the Team Around the Child model commonly used in schools, where professionals collaborate within a single coordinated process. From the perspective of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation, this kind of coordinated, multi-agency structure has the potential to support higher levels of participation by ensuring that the adults responsible for implementing decisions are present and able to act on YP's expressed views.

An unexpected topic that emerged from the findings was the experience of working with YP in care, as this was not an initial focus of the investigation. This factor influenced how ARMs were perceived by both school staff and carers. As noted earlier, two of the three YP in this study were in care, and consequently were required to have PEP meetings to review their educational progress. The PEP functions as a statutory component of a child's care plan, outlining their education, support and achievements. It is mandated under the Children Act (1989), which places a legal duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are looked after.

PEPs share similarities with ARMs in that both are child-centred meetings reviewing progress within an educational setting. However, a key distinction is that PEPs are arranged and facilitated by social workers, whereas EHCP ARMs are organised by school staff (Hayden, 2005; Sugden, 2013). This structural difference may explain why social workers were more likely to attend PEP meetings than ARMs. This was reflected in the findings, where staff perceived ARMs as relatively informal and carers noted that social workers were present for PEPs but not for ARMs. In terms of Hart's (1992) model, the absence of key decision-makers at ARMs may limit opportunities for YP to reach higher levels of participation, as their views cannot be meaningfully acted upon without the involvement of those with statutory responsibility. Consequently, even when YP's perspectives are elicited effectively, the structural context may constrain the extent to which their participation translates into shared decision-making.

15.8 Person-centred approaches

Recent legislative changes have placed increasing emphasis on person-centred approaches, positioning CYP at the forefront of decision-making (Children and Families Act, 2014; Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015). Person-centred approaches promote collaboration between CYP, school staff and parents/carers. One way this is implemented is through person-centred planning meetings (Gregory & Atkinson, 2023), in which CYP are the central focus and their experiences within the setting are explored in depth. Key features of person-centred planning include ongoing consultation with the young person, regular review of the plan, and active involvement of parents/carers throughout the process (Gregory & Atkinson, 2023). This aligns with Hart's (1992) participation model, particularly the middle and higher levels of the Ladder, which emphasise shared decision-making between adults and CYP and the active incorporation of YP's perspectives into planning.

Across interviews in the present study, person-centred approaches were evident in the ways staff adapted communication methods to elicit YP's views for their ARM. School staff also incorporated psychosocial approaches—such as using Drama activities—to support YP in preparing for post-16 education or employment. These strategies helped YP explore social environments, develop confidence and practise skills relevant to future transitions. In terms of Hart's (1992) ladder, such practices reflect participation at levels where adults initiate processes but intentionally create space for YP to influence decisions in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them. As a result, person-centred planning contributed to YP having a meaningful role in discussions about their lives, including planning transitions and reintegrating into their settings (Corrigan, 2014).

15.9. Implications for Young People transitioning to post-16 education or employment

During interviews, it was found that all YP demonstrated the capacity to make decisions about their post-16 pathways, as they were able to communicate whether they wished to remain in their current setting or pursue future employment. In response, the school created work-experience opportunities and implemented psychosocial approaches to support these aspirations (Taylor & McAvoy, 2014). This reflects participation at the middle levels of Hart's (1992) Ladder, where adults initiate processes but actively incorporate YP's preferences into planning. However, interviews also indicated that adaptations were required to ensure YP's views were elicited accurately. For some YP, this involved gathering their views over an extended period to accommodate their communication needs and ensure their preferences were fully understood. Such adaptations are consistent with Hart's (1992) emphasis on creating conditions that enable CYP to participate meaningfully, rather than superficially, in decisions affecting their lives.

These findings align with evidence from Bruck, Webster and Clark's (2021) investigation, which reported that staff in special schools or autism-specific settings often provide more intensive support when planning transitions than staff in mainstream schools. This was reflected in the present study, where YP engaged in drama sessions and exploratory activities to prepare for post-16 pathways. These approaches highlight the importance of tailored, developmentally appropriate support in enabling YP with communication and interaction needs to participate meaningfully in transition planning.

16.0 Implications related to Psychological Theory

As outlined in the introduction to the empirical paper, psychological theories and concepts such as Narrative Psychology (Sarbin, 1986) informed both the design and interpretation of this research.

From a constructivist epistemological stance, meaning is understood as being actively constructed through an individual's reflections, interpretations and interactions with their environment, rather than discovered as an objective truth. Narrative Psychology aligns closely with this position, emphasising how individuals make sense of their experiences through the stories they construct and share. Within this study, the use of Personal Profiles reflected this narrative and constructivist approach by providing a structured yet flexible tool through which YP could articulate their perspectives in ways that foregrounded their lived experiences and the meanings they attributed to them.

Narrative Psychology was also evident in the experiences of staff supporting YP with communication and interaction needs. Staff described making ongoing adaptations to elicit YP's views, demonstrating sensitivity to the evolving ways in which YP constructed and communicated their preferences. These adaptations reflect a constructivist understanding of communication as shaped by an individual's internal meaning-making processes, influenced by the relational and contextual environment e.g., staff and setting. Across interviews, staff's experiences highlighted that they were not simply "collecting" views; rather, they were supporting YP to construct and express their own understandings over time.

This narrative-informed practice extended into supporting YP's goals and aspirations within ARMs. For example, when YP expressed a desire to pursue work opportunities post-16, staff responded by arranging work experience placements; when others wished to remain in their current setting, their preferences were respected and acted upon. These examples highlight how YP's narratives actively shaped the decisions made about their futures.

Across the interviews, staff demonstrated relational practices—a core feature of narrative approaches—when engaging with YP. These relational practices helped YP feel comfortable and supported when sharing their views as part of the ARM process. In relation to Person-Centred Planning (PCP), the research highlighted how YP's frameworks for understanding their world were shaped through their sensory experiences within the school environment. Psychosocial practices, such as drama and role play, were used to prepare YP for post-16 provision, influencing how they constructed meaning and engaged with future planning. These practices align with a constructivist view that identities, preferences and aspirations develop through an individual's ongoing interpretation of their experiences.

This study also drew on principles of Narrative Inquiry, which conceptualises experience as storied, relational and situated within specific social and cultural contexts (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000). Narrative Inquiry assumes that stories are co-constructed through the interaction between researcher and participant, shaped by the interview context, the relational dynamics and the broader cultural narratives available to the individual. This was reflected in the way participants views were elicited and interpreted. The interviews created space for participants (including YP) to narrate their experiences of the annual review process (supported where necessary by staff), their relationships with adults in their setting and their aspirations for the future. This approach enabled the findings to illuminate not only what participants expressed but also how they structured and made sense of their experiences.

This theory became particularly relevant as YP demonstrated the capacity to make informed decisions about their post-16 choices. From a constructivist perspective, competence and autonomy are not fixed traits but develop through individuals' interpretations of their experiences and the support available to them. YP were able to engage in decision-making when appropriate adaptations and scaffolding were provided by their setting, illustrating how supportive environments can enhance opportunities for agency by enabling YP to construct a sense of capability and autonomy.

17.0. Implications for Annual Review Meeting Process

As stated earlier in the discussion, a notable barrier identified across this setting was the lack of local authority attendance at ARMs. This appeared to be because local authority staff prioritised attending PEP meetings rather than ARMs. Consequently, ARMs were often perceived as "informal" and similar to "parent's evenings". This overlap in purpose—both meetings reviewing a YP's progress—created the impression that holding both meetings could be redundant. To address this, approaches such as Team Around the Family have been used in other contexts to streamline multi-agency involvement, and a similar model could be adopted here by integrating ARMs and PEPs into a single coordinated meeting rather than maintaining two separate processes. Within Hart's (1992) framework, this highlights that the absence of key decision-makers at ARMs restricts opportunities for YP to reach higher levels of participation, as their views cannot meaningfully influence decisions without the involvement of those with statutory responsibility.

In relation to YP attendance, anxiety and limited understanding of the ARM process were identified as key barriers. Some YP in this study were unable to attend due to feeling overwhelmed or unfamiliar with what the meeting involved. Anxiety was often triggered by the presence of too many adults and by hybrid meeting formats that increased the number of people present. These

findings suggest that future ARMs could be facilitated in environments that feel more comfortable and predictable for YP. For example, one YP suggested that having a friend present would help them feel more at ease and more willing to attend. Related to Hart's (1992) framework, this suggests that reducing environmental stressors and providing relational support may enable YP to move towards higher levels of participation by helping them engage more confidently and meaningfully in the process.

17.1. Study limitations and considerations for future research

The research project involved a relatively small number of participants (8). It was not possible to arrange a final interview with a parent in one of the case study groups, resulting in only two parents' perspectives being included. Although this is not a major limitation, the additional parent may have offered further insight into experiences of the ARM. Another challenge was that YP found it easier to respond to closed questions than open-ended ones. During interviews, YP were generally able to answer only selected questions—typically those relating to their goals and aspirations—and only one participant was able to articulate how they would like the ARM process to be made more inclusive. This may have been influenced by the use of open-ended rather than more structured interview questions. Within Hart's (1992) framework, this suggests that the methods used to elicit YP's views may not always have enabled them to participate at higher levels of the Ladder, as the format of questioning may have constrained their ability to express more complex or reflective perspectives.

To address this, future research could incorporate a follow-up group interview with YP or adopt a mixed-methods approach. For example, providing participants with a pre- or post-interview survey could allow them to elaborate on their responses or engage with questions in a different format. A post-interview survey may also enable participants to add further context or process questions that they may not have fully understood during the interview itself, particularly given that interviews lasted up to 60 minutes.

This investigation was conducted within a single special school setting, which has implications for the generalisability of the findings. The specificity of the setting, alongside the expertise of staff working with YP with communication and interaction needs, limits the extent to which the findings can be applied to mainstream school contexts. However, the outcomes may be relevant to other special school settings with similar communication and interaction specialisms. Across England, special schools vary considerably in their focus—for example, some specialise in Moderate or Profound Learning Difficulties, others in Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs, and others in

alternative provision. Staff in these settings often develop distinct skills tailored to their pupil populations, which may influence how findings are interpreted or applied.

Nevertheless, certain approaches identified in this study—such as relational practices (Roffey, 2012) and adaptations like collecting pupil views over time—could be implemented more universally. These strategies were central to eliciting the perspectives of YP in this investigation and may therefore hold relevance across both special and mainstream contexts. Related to Hart's (1992) framework**,** relational and adaptive practices can help move participation beyond basic consultation by creating conditions in which YP feel safe, supported and able to contribute meaningfully.

Another implication of this investigation was the inclusion of participants who were in care. Their contributions introduced insights shaped by the care system, prompting further discussion about multi-agency involvement. In particular, the role of local authorities in PEPs and ARMs was highlighted. During participant recruitment, greater consideration could have been given to the impact of care status. For example, adapting questions to explore how being in care influenced the facilitation of their views, or how it shaped their transition to adulthood, may have provided greater insight into the findings. This underscores the importance of recognising contextual factors—such as care experience—when designing research with YP. In Hart's (1992) framework, this identifies that structural and contextual influences—such as care status and multi-agency involvement—shape the extent to which YP can participate at higher levels of the Ladder, as these factors determine whose voices are present, whose decisions carry weight, and how YP's contributions are acted upon.

17.2. Implications for Future Practice

This research project was conducted within a single special school setting and examined three case studies of the annual review process, contributing to the limited literature on experiences of ARMs in such contexts. Future research could explore similar work in mainstream schools to compare YP's experiences of ARMs across settings, particularly given evidence that YP in mainstream contexts often do not contribute to their ARMs despite being physically present. As highlighted in the literature review, video-based methods may offer an alternative tool for eliciting pupil views, as demonstrated in Simpson, Imms and Keen's (2021) investigation. For Educational Psychology practice, this study raises important considerations regarding effective approaches for eliciting the views of YP in special school settings, especially as EPs frequently work in these

contexts as part of early intervention. The findings also emphasise the value of EP attendance at ARMs.

In relation to recent developments in ARM literature, Boorman, Cohman, Kovshoff, Chidley, Hall and Timney (2025) examined the experiences of EPs and SENCOs using PCP-informed ARMs. Their findings suggested that PCP ARMs offered an alternative perspective, enabling professionals—particularly SENCOs—to feel that their voices were heard. However, unlike the present thesis, their study focused solely on the perspectives of attendees, whereas this investigation explored multiple viewpoints, including those of YP, parents/carers and EP practice. Within EP practice, PCP meetings have long been used to collaboratively include the voices of YP, parents/carers and school staff, and the findings of this thesis further reinforce the value of such approaches.

Additional implications of this thesis relate to its potential to serve as a framework for working with YP with communication and interaction needs. This includes identifying best practice for tools that facilitate their views, such as gathering input over time and prioritising relational practice as a foundation for meaningful participation.

With regard to the Educational Psychology doctorate, the findings highlight the importance of training TEPs in strategies for eliciting the views of, and working effectively with, CYP who have complex speech and language needs. Ensuring that these perspectives are accurately represented is particularly relevant when TEPs undertake EHCNAs during training. SLTs could contribute valuable expertise through teaching sessions and shadowing opportunities. Furthermore, the Educational Psychology doctorate could integrate more multi-agency learning into taught components, fostering collaboration between TEPs and SLTs. Such cross-disciplinary practice is emphasised in the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Health and Education, 2015). Notably, some universities already deliver both the Educational Psychology doctorate and the Speech and Language Therapy master's programme, offering opportunities for joint learning.

Finally, for parents and carers, schools and colleges could share examples of effective ARM practice through online forums, such as SENCO networks and cluster meetings, supporting greater consistency and transparency in how ARMs are facilitated.

18.0 Conclusion

This research project was facilitated using a constructivist epistemology (Darlaston-Jones, 2007) to explore the realities and constructions of ARMs within a special school setting. The study initially aimed to examine how Young People's (YP's) views were included in decision-making during their ARM, particularly in relation to their post-16 transitions to education or employment. To address this aim, interviews were conducted with YP, school staff and parents/carers, guided by four research questions:

1. How were YP's views elicited for their ARM?
2. To what extent were YP involved in decision-making?
3. How did YP, carers and school staff perceive the ARM?
4. What was the level of local authority involvement in these meetings?

Findings related to Research Question 1 highlighted the importance of having a consistent medium through which to elicit YP's views. Across all cases, YP's perspectives were captured through the *Personal Profile*, which included their goals and aspirations for post-16 education or employment and directly informed decision-making at the ARM. A range of methods were used to gather information for the Personal Profile, including collecting views over time (e.g., across two weeks), consulting staff who knew the YP well, and using visuals or sign language to support communication.

Research Question 2 demonstrated that YP's views played a meaningful role in decision-making. In two cases, staff arranged work experience opportunities in response to YP's expressed aspirations, while in another case, staff supported a YP's preference to remain in their current setting.

Research Question 3 revealed varied perceptions of the ARM across YP, carers and school staff. YP were generally unfamiliar with the purpose of the ARM, although they were able to answer questions about specific elements of the process. Carers viewed the ARM as an opportunity to update their understanding of their child's progress, with one carer noting that the ARM was not dissimilar to a PEP meeting. School staff, however, perceived ARMs as relatively informal due to the absence of local authority professionals, with meetings typically involving only carers and school staff.

Research Question 4 confirmed that local authority staff did not attend any of the ARMs in this study, although they were present for PEP meetings. As PEPs can be chaired by either Social

Workers or designated teachers, it is possible that Social Workers attended PEPs because they chaired them, whereas ARMs—chaired by school staff—did not receive the same level of local authority involvement.

Overall, the findings suggest that having a consistent tool for eliciting CYP's views—adapted to their communication needs—may support more meaningful participation in ARMs. Sharing practice across school settings could further strengthen approaches to gathering pupil voice.

For EP practice, the findings indicate that EP or local authority attendance may enhance the perceived status of ARMs, distinguishing them from other school-based meetings such as parents' evenings or PEPs. The study also underscores the importance of using communication tools familiar to YP to ensure their views are accurately represented during statutory processes.

This study contributes to the literature on ARMs by highlighting effective practices for eliciting YP's views and demonstrating the influence these views can have on post-16 transitions. It also adds to the broader literature on YP's involvement in decision-making, illustrating how collaborative tools such as the Personal Profile can shape outcomes. As the study was conducted within a single special school setting, it offers valuable insight into an underrepresented group—post-16 learners with SEN—and provides a foundation for future research in similar contexts with comparable demographics.

Chapter 3-Reflective Account

1.0. Introduction and Overview

This reflective chapter draws primarily on entries from my reflective diary written throughout the process of completing this thesis. Reflection can be understood as the opportunity to revisit previous experiences in order to critically analyse an event or process (Rowley et al., 2023). Throughout the doctorate, I have documented my ongoing development as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), moving from an *'Unconscious Incompetent'* practitioner towards someone who is increasingly *'Conscious Competent'*, in line with the Four Stages of Competence Model (Flower, 1999). Reflexivity, by contrast, involves examining one's own beliefs, assumptions and practices (Yourston & Brown, 2024).

Within this investigation, reflexivity concerned the ways in which my own judgements, interpretations and positionality shaped the research process. Both reflection and reflexivity are core components of TEP and EP practice, as emphasised by the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC), which states: *"Understand the value of reflective practice and the need to record the outcome of such reflection to support continuous improvement"* (HCPC, 10.1).

To support my reflective diary, I drew on Jasper's (2013) ERA Cycle—Experience, Reflection and Action—as a framework for examining my learning throughout the thesis, particularly during the data analysis stage. The ERA Cycle begins with an experience, whether positive or negative, followed by a period of reflection on that experience, and culminates in an action informed by the insights gained. This model was particularly relevant to this project, as I underwent several significant revisions, both during the ethical approval process and while identifying themes within the interview transcripts. Jasper's (2013) model also aligns closely with my constructivist epistemological stance, which assumes that individuals construct knowledge based on their lived realities and interactions (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). Within this thesis, my understanding of Annual Review Meetings (ARMs) was shaped through my engagement with the literature, my interactions with participants and the meanings I constructed while analysing the data.

2.0. Background and Personal Position

I selected the topic of ARMs for my thesis because of my longstanding interest in supporting Young People (YP) who are post-16. This interest stems from my previous role as a Special Educational Needs Tutor, where I worked with a young adult with complex needs in a residential

home. My curiosity about ARMs developed from witnessing this young adult experience an unsuccessful transition from their education setting into their care home. This prompted me to question the extent to which their views had been incorporated into the decision-making process. The young adult also had significant language impairments and communicated using sign language and visual tools such as Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS). Although I had previously worked with a young child with speech and language needs, supporting a young adult introduced a new level of complexity, as they had already established their own communication system. This required me to develop my skills in using visual tools and adapt my communication to ensure their views were understood and respected.

My interest in post-16 pathways deepened during the first year of the doctorate, when my initial assignment focused on the historical and contemporary policy and legislation relating to young people with SEND in post-16 education and training. This enabled me to become familiar with key legislation such as the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and the Equality Act (2010), and to develop a stronger understanding of post-16 provision through the Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) framework. During this process, I also learned about post-16 training routes (e.g., apprenticeships and traineeships) and educational pathways (e.g., ASDAN qualifications) available to young people with SEND in England (Department for Health and Department for Education, 2015).

When reviewing the literature on post-16 education and employment, I noticed a significant gap in research relating specifically to ARMs, despite the increasing number of Children and Young people (CYP) with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in England. The Office for National Statistics reported that 4.8% of CYP had an EHCP in 2024, an increase from 4.3% in 2023. Much of the existing literature on ARMs was deficit-focused, highlighting that YP's voices were often not meaningfully facilitated during their reviews, which in turn affected their aspirations and future transitions. Furthermore, most ARM research centred on mainstream schools, with limited attention given to special school contexts. This gap provided a clear rationale for undertaking a research project in this area.

I also felt that this project would be particularly relevant for Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) and Educational Psychologists (EPs), as we work with CYP across both mainstream and specialist settings when conducting Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs). The findings from this study offer insights into good practice for eliciting the views of YP with communication and interaction needs and contribute to wider discussions about how to support YP's attendance and participation in ARMs.

2.1. External Influences and Feasibility

When this research project was conceived and data were collected, there were no restrictions on conducting face-to-face interviews, as school-based limitations following the global pandemic had largely subsided. However, the project was externally shaped by two key factors: the ethics committee's considerations regarding the feasibility of the study, and my transition between placement services during the research process. These influences are discussed in the following section and revisited at relevant points throughout this chapter.

2.2. Early Considerations and Decisions

My initial conception for this research project was to conduct a participatory study (Wallis & Giles, 2019) with YP as part of their ARM. This early design involved co-creating questions with YP and inviting them to respond through video-recorded clips. Video was initially considered because research by Giles and Rowley (2020) and Simpson, Imms and Keen (2021) demonstrated that video-based methods can successfully support CYP to express their views, offering them ownership over the content and enabling meaningful collaboration with researchers. This represented the experience stage of the ERA cycle, where I was motivated by a desire to design a method that maximised YP's agency and participation.

However, as I began exploring the practicalities of this approach, the feasibility proved limited. Coordinating suitable timescales for filming, editing and preparing video content ahead of participants' ARMs would have been complex, and the process required substantial logistical planning. Additionally, if the proposal had been approved, all parties—YP, parents/carers and school staff—would have needed to consent to a significant alteration to the ARM process, which risked reducing the number of participants able or willing to take part.

Engaging in the reflection stage of the ERA cycle, I recognised that although the participatory video approach aligned strongly with my values around authentic pupil voice, it was not workable within the constraints of my placement, university commitments and the school context. This prompted a reconsideration of the design. As a result, the project was revised, but key elements of the initial design were retained—particularly the focus on interviewing YP, school staff and parents/carers about their experiences of the ARM. This allowed me to preserve the core intention of amplifying YP's perspectives while adopting a more feasible method.

I also briefly considered using video to elicit YP's views for their EHCNA. However, similar challenges emerged: schools, YP, parents/carers and the local authority would all need to agree to a substantial modification of the statutory assessment process. For ARMs, I additionally considered observing meetings to explore how YP's views were incorporated into decision-making, as EPs often attend ARMs as part of their practice. However, observation alone would not have provided the depth of insight needed to understand participants' experiences, particularly given that YP may not attend their ARMs or, if present, may not have an active role in the meeting (Palikara, 2020).

This reflective process led directly to the action stage of the ERA cycle, where I made a methodological decision to adopt semi-structured interviews as the primary data-collection method. This approach balanced feasibility with depth, enabling me to explore participants' experiences meaningfully while maintaining a realistic scope for the project. It also aligned with my broader professional development as a TEP, reinforcing the importance of adapting research methods to context while remaining committed to inclusive practice.

2.3. Ethics

The process of gaining ethical approval was rigorous and time-consuming, requiring multiple revisions and ongoing feedback from my research supervisor. Alongside the main application, I was required to submit several supporting documents—such as adapted consent forms and recruitment materials—to ensure that participants received clear and accessible information before providing consent. Although I had been introduced to the ethics process during my first year of the Doctorate, when I sought approval for a small-scale project involving a single Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and a questionnaire, the demands of the process increased substantially in my second and third years.

Ethical approval for this thesis project had to be submitted ahead of monthly panel deadlines, each capped at a limited number of applications. This created a sense of pressure, as missing a deadline meant waiting an additional month for the panel to review the project. My initial application was rejected due to concerns about feasibility, as discussed earlier, which further heightened my anxiety about meeting deadlines and ensuring the project remained viable.

This experience offered multiple opportunities for critical reflection, particularly regarding the importance of realistic planning and timescales while balancing placement responsibilities and thesis writing. It also prompted me to think carefully about which participants were essential to

gaining an accurate understanding of ARMs. I initially considered including local authority staff; however, doing so would have required access to participants' EHCPs to identify relevant professionals, which would have breached confidentiality. Furthermore, research by Palikara (2020), alongside my own interview experiences, indicated that local authority staff rarely attend ARMs due to capacity constraints. Including them would therefore have added unnecessary complexity to an already demanding project without offering substantial additional insight.

During the ethics phase, I also reflected on aspects of my inclusion and exclusion criteria that, in hindsight, I would have considered more carefully. First, I did not account for participants' personal backgrounds, such as whether YP were in care. This became a significant factor, as two of the three YP interviewed were looked-after children. Their experiences introduced discussions about the care system—particularly PEP meetings—which highlighted parallels with ARMs and broadened my understanding of the wider decision-making landscape surrounding these YP. Second, I did not include criteria relating to whether parents/carers had attended multiple ARMs. While school staff were able to draw on extensive experience of ARMs, carers often had limited exposure, which influenced the depth and nature of the insights they were able to provide. These reflections emphasised the importance of carefully considering participant characteristics at the planning stage, as these factors can meaningfully shape the data generated and the conclusions drawn.

2.4 Recruitment

Once ethical approval had been secured, I was able to begin contacting school settings in the Eastern Region. However, the timing of this stage was shaped by several practical constraints, including the availability of public email addresses on school websites and the existing relationships between EPs and their designated schools for early intervention work. I initially approached a mainstream secondary school and a special school within a local authority in the Eastern Region. Neither setting was able to commit to the project: one only educated pupils up to age 14, and in the other, ARMs were facilitated solely by the SENCO, which meant I would not have been able to gather staff perspectives on ARMs—a central focus of the research.

After sending numerous emails and recruitment flyers, a special school expressed interest. Following a meeting with the Head of Sixth Form and subsequent approval from the Head Teacher, I was able to proceed with data collection. On reflection, I recognise that my inclusion and exclusion criteria may have been overly restrictive; had they been broader, additional school settings might have been able to participate.

In relation to recruitment bias, the project involved selection bias, as participants were required to have an EHCP and to have experienced an ARM during the 2023/2024 academic year. They also needed to be between 14 and 18 years old, which further limited the pool of eligible YP. However, because the interviews explored Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) outcomes and transitions into education or employment, and because ethical approval had been granted for work with 14–18-year-olds, I proceeded with this age range. In hindsight, I may have considered widening the demographic to include YP aged 19, as some YP in sixth form or college could fall within this age group. Doing so may have increased the number of eligible participants and broadened the range of perspectives captured within the study.

3.0. Methodology

At the stage of designing participant information sheets for recruitment, I was required to follow university guidelines and use the standardised forms provided. However, I felt that the information on these forms could be perceived as overly complex for participants, as they were text-heavy and lacked visual supports. This raised concerns about accessibility, particularly as I aimed to work with YP with EHCPs, who may experience barriers when reading dense written information and subsequently providing informed consent.

In response, I sought guidance from my research supervisor to simplify the participant information sheets and adapt them into a more child-friendly format, incorporating visuals and reducing the volume of text. This adaptation was especially important because YP aged 16 and over were required to provide their own consent, making it essential that they fully understood the information before agreeing to participate. This approach proved effective, as YP demonstrated clear understanding of key ethical principles—such as anonymity and their right to withdraw—prior to the interviews.

As I developed the interview questions for the ethics application, I focused on exploring the experiences of YP, school staff and parents/carers in relation to the ARM process. The questions also addressed inclusivity and the tools used to gather YP's views. However, upon reflection, I realised that participants held differing interpretations of what constituted an ARM. For example, some staff perceived ARMs as informal due to the absence of local authority professionals, while others viewed them as opportunities to update carers on a child's progress. In hindsight, I would have begun each interview by asking participants to define what an ARM meant to them, as this would have provided important contextual grounding for their responses. Methodologically, a case

study design (Gustafsson, 2017) was appropriate, as it enabled me to examine three distinct ARM experiences in depth and compare them across cases. This approach also supported triangulation during thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2017), strengthening the credibility of the findings.

I limited the investigation to three participant groups—YP, school staff and parents/carers—to allow for in-depth exploration of their experiences. This resulted in a smaller sample size but enabled longer interviews, lasting up to 60 minutes, which provided participants with sufficient time to share detailed accounts. The extended interview duration was also intended to accommodate YP who required alternative communication methods, such as sign language or Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), and to ensure they had adequate time to process and respond to questions (Farmer & Stringer, 2023). In relation to Jasper's (2013) ERA Cycle, I recognise that my interviews with YP were shaped by my limited prior experience of working with YP with speech and language needs such as extended interviews lengths.

3.1. Facilitating semi-structured interviews

Earlier in my final year of the doctorate, I had gained experience interviewing participants as part of my organisational change project, which involved facilitating a focus group with school staff. However, I had no prior experience interviewing YP or carers in a research capacity. Once participants consented to take part in this project, arranging interview schedules was relatively straightforward, with some opting for in-person interviews and others preferring virtual interviews via Microsoft Teams.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, all participants were aware that the interviews would focus on their ARM and their experiences within the school setting, as clearly stated in the consent forms and recruitment materials. However, my experience interviewing YP with communication and interaction needs highlighted the importance of modelling questions and using staff support to scaffold responses. This prompted reflection on my own professional competence. Although I had worked with CYP with a range of needs as a TEP, I lacked confidence in using sign language and engaging effectively with YP with communication and interaction needs. This made the first interview a significant learning curve. Over time, however, I became increasingly fluent and confident, reflecting the progression described in the Four Stages of Competence Model (Flower, 1999). I adapted by simplifying questions, using gestures and breaking down prompts to support understanding.

This approach aligned with literature emphasising the importance of adapting communication for CYP with additional needs and, viewed through Hart's (1992) framework, supported YP to participate at levels where their contributions could be meaningfully expressed. During the interviews, I also questioned whether I should have incorporated tools such as PECS or Widget symbols, which were familiar to YP and could have supported their comprehension of the questions.

Reflecting on this process reminded me of the importance of observation and modelling, as described in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). Observing staff interactions with pupils during interviews unconsciously shaped my own practice—for example, simplifying questions, pacing my speech and using gestures. These adaptations enabled me to elicit richer responses from YP depending on the nature of the question such as their goals and aspirations. I was also mindful of participants' wellbeing, particularly given that anxiety is a known barrier to YP's participation in meetings (Saunders, Kirk & Waldie, 2015). I therefore offered breaks and avoided placing pressure on participants when they were unable to answer a question. Hart's (1992) model highlights that reducing environmental stressors and providing relational support can help YP move towards higher levels of participation, and this was reflected in the adjustments I made during the interview process.

The level of detail provided by YP varied considerably. While all participants were able to engage in interviews and advocate their views. For example. some were able to discuss their experiences in school and their goals and aspirations, but struggled to answer questions specifically about their ARM. This was largely because they had not attended their ARM, making it difficult for them to comment on how the process could be made more inclusive. Only one YP was able to answer this question, suggesting that having a friend present and ensuring all attendees were physically in the room (rather than joining virtually) would help them feel more comfortable. In contrast, school staff and carers provided more detailed accounts of barriers affecting ARMs, such as limited local authority attendance and overlap between services.

Because only one YP was able to provide a detailed response, the findings may have been affected by the limited depth of pupil voice, particularly regarding ARMs. This lack of detail was linked to YP's unfamiliarity with the ARM process. Many YP attend multiple meetings, such as PEPs, which serve similar functions in eliciting views and exploring aspirations. The overlap between these processes may have contributed to confusion or disengagement, reducing the detail YP were able to provide. Using Hart's (1992) Ladder as a conceptual guide, this highlights

how structural factors can restrict opportunities for YP to participate at higher levels, even when their capacity to contribute is evident.

This raises important questions about how researchers prepare YP for involvement in structured meetings. During the planning stages, greater emphasis could have been placed on scaffolding YP's understanding of the ARM process—for example, through preparatory sessions, visual supports or pre-interview discussions. Such strategies may have enabled YP to differentiate between meetings and articulate their views more confidently. Despite the limited pupil voice, the findings highlighted the value of triangulation. Staff reflections and parental perspectives were essential in providing a holistic understanding of how ARMs were facilitated in this setting.

Reflecting on my interview approach, I wondered whether combining individual interviews with a small group interview (Hassler, Støre, Persson & Beckman, 2024) might have enabled YP to share more information. Alternatively, the project could have been structured around three focus groups—one for each participant demographic. Conducting a pilot study may also have helped me refine my interview techniques and identify the most effective ways of interacting with YP.

Reflecting on the tools used to elicit YP's views, I also considered whether alternative methods such as Talking Mats (Murphy & Cameron, 2008) could have been employed. I had previously used Talking Mats in casework with a selectively mute YP and found it to be an effective communication tool. Talking Mats can be used in both physical and digital formats to support CYP in expressing their interests, particularly during the early stages of an interview. They may also have been valuable in exploring how YP make decisions about post-16 pathways. For example, visuals could have been used to represent Jesse's decision to remain in school, providing a more accessible and structured way for him to articulate his thought process. Incorporating such tools may enhance the authenticity of participation by ensuring that YP with diverse communication needs can contribute meaningfully to discussions about their educational futures—an essential condition for achieving the higher levels of participation described by Hart (1992).

3.2. Analysing data using Thematic Analysis

I had previously conducted a Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2017) for my Organisational Change project during the Doctorate, but I had not undertaken a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). In that earlier project, I interviewed staff at a secondary school to identify common themes relating to their wellbeing policy. However, I had not conducted a TA on the scale required for this thesis, which involved extensive time reading, re-reading and revising

transcripts. I also encountered challenges analysing data from three different participant groups, each with varying understandings of ARMs. This made it more difficult to identify common themes across the dataset.

As highlighted throughout this thesis, I had limited prior experience facilitating interviews with YP who have speech and language difficulties. Although I was able to elicit responses from YP—which was a central aim of the study—the depth and complexity of responses were more evident in contributions from staff and parents/carers. Some YP were able to communicate their answers verbally and independently, while others required scaffolding from staff. This variation was reflected in the differing levels of detail across responses. For example, Jesse was able to articulate that having a friend present would make ARMs feel more inclusive, whereas other YP were unable to answer this question. Viewed through Hart's (1992) framework, this variation highlights how differing levels of communicative support can influence the extent to which YP are able to participate meaningfully in discussions about their educational experiences.

In relation to Jasper's ERA Cycle (2013), my focus centred on interpreting the findings through the lens of my own experiences of facilitating the interviews, in an effort to minimise preconceived biases from literature. This was the primary reason for not adopting a Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach, which places greater emphasis on the researcher's subjectivity as an analytic resource. While this decision may have limited the depth of reflexivity in the results and findings chapters, it ensured that the themes remained closely grounded in the views of YP, parents/carers and school staff. Maintaining this representativeness was a key aim of the research, particularly given the limited existing literature capturing the perspectives of these groups in relation to ARMs. Using Hart's (1992) Ladder as a guide, this approach also ensured that the analytic process did not inadvertently overshadow the voices of YP—whose participation, while supported, was shaped by the communicative and contextual barriers identified throughout the study.

3.3. Interpretation of findings

Maintaining participant anonymity in this investigation was challenging, as there are relatively few special schools with specialist status in communication and interaction, and the participant group was small. To protect confidentiality, I therefore limited the information reported about participant characteristics to their roles (e.g., teacher, pupil) and their relationships within each case study group.

I found it helpful to follow the guidelines outlined in Braun and Clarke's (2017) thematic analysis, as this provided a clear structure for identifying codes within the transcripts before developing them into themes. Although I had used this approach in my first- and third-year organisational change projects, I had not previously applied it to a project of this scale. As a result, I experienced considerable challenges analysing a large number of interviews and "making sense" of the data.

As noted earlier, an unexpected development in the project was working with a YP who was in care. This expanded the scope of the project, as the data included information about their experiences of the care system in addition to their ARM. This made it more difficult to maintain a focused narrative on ARMs during analysis. On reflection, this raises the possibility of a follow-up study exploring Social Workers' experiences of ARMs, given that they are invited to both ARMs and PEP meetings but, in my experience of the interviews, only attended the latter.

Working with YP in care also required sensitivity when asking questions about their school experiences, as I was mindful of the potential for distress when recalling past events. This reinforced the importance of adopting a trauma-informed and relational approach during interviews, ensuring that YP felt safe, supported and able to withdraw or pause at any point.

4.0. Reflections on writing this thesis

An additional factor that I did not discuss earlier in the thesis was the unexpected change in my placement service. This occurred during the period in which I was preparing and submitting my ethics application, meaning that I had to balance the demands of moving into a new service, relocating geographically, and managing the pressures of my final year of the doctorate. This experience had a significant impact on my personal wellbeing and required me to navigate competing priorities at a time when the research project was rapidly evolving. As a result, several processes—such as identifying local priorities within my new placement service, recruiting participants, and arranging travel for data collection—had to be readjusted and carefully managed alongside the ongoing development of the study.

In relation to writing the thesis, I had previously completed dissertations at undergraduate and Master's level, but these were not comparable in scale or complexity to producing a doctoral thesis. The process of drafting, receiving feedback and redrafting often felt cyclical and never-ending; however, each iteration strengthened the clarity and coherence of the work. I was particularly grateful that, despite changing placement services, I retained the same research supervisor throughout the project. This continuity helped maintain the core identity of the

research—its focus on post-16 pathways and ARMs—despite the numerous revisions the project underwent.

I recognised how the disruption caused by the placement change shaped both the practical and emotional dimensions of the research process. It highlighted the importance of flexibility, self-regulation and realistic planning when managing a large-scale project alongside professional responsibility. Reflecting on these challenges also enabled me to evaluate my developing competency as a practitioner, particularly in relation to working with YP with speech and language needs and adapting my communication style during interviews.

My experience of using Jasper's (2013) ERA Cycle to support the writing of this thesis was that it offered a structured yet flexible framework. I drew on different elements of the cycle at various stages of the research process. For example, I reflected on my experiences of interviewing YP while simultaneously evaluating my own professional growth. These reflections were noted throughout this chapter and when writing this thesis. The ERA Cycle also helped highlight the evolving nature of this research. The initial conception of the study centred on the use of video, but this was later streamlined to focus on interviews with YP, carers and school staff. This enabling me to adapt the methodology in response to practical constraints while maintaining a commitment to representing participants' voices authentically. The framework therefore supported a responsive and grounded approach to the research, ensuring that the study remained aligned with both its aims and the needs of those involved.

4.1. Application to Educational Psychologist Practice

Findings from this investigation also highlighted the importance of EP and/or local authority attendance at ARMs. This outcome was anticipated, as it aligns with the literature review and with my own experiences working within a local authority. It is hoped that this research will contribute to increasing attendance from local authority professionals, including EPs, to help distinguish ARMs from other meetings such as PEPs. In relation to interacting with YP, the findings also have clear implications for EP practice. The study demonstrated that collecting a YP's views over a period of time can result in more accurate and representative pupil voice. However, similar to the challenges associated with local authority attendance, it may not always be feasible for EPs to gather YP's views across an extended timeframe, particularly given the increasing demand for EP services and the need for practitioners to manage their time carefully.

4.2. Impact on thesis practice to becoming a Newly Qualified Educational Psychologist

The impact of this thesis on my journey towards becoming a Newly Qualified Educational Psychologist (NQEP) has led me to focus on two key areas in the immediate future. The first is the importance of relationships. As highlighted in the discussion chapter, school staff employed relational approaches—such as demonstrating empathy towards YP and making thoughtful adaptations to elicit their views. This contributed to the strong rapport I observed between YP and staff during interviews. As evidenced in my second research question, YP played an active role in decision-making during their ARMs. Observing these interactions reinforced my understanding that relational practice is central to eliciting authentic pupil voice. Strong, trusting relationships create a foundation in which YP feel secure, respected and able to express their views openly. This will remain a cornerstone of my practice as I transition into the NQEP role.

The second area I intend to prioritise is developing expertise in alternative communication tools. Approaches such as those outlined by Murphy and Cameron (2008) are essential for supporting YP with communication and interaction needs. After graduating, I plan to learn sign language to strengthen my ability to work effectively with YP who use non-verbal or augmented communication systems. Enhancing my competence in this area will enable me to facilitate more inclusive and accessible opportunities for YP to share their views.

This thesis also has the potential to inform and enrich national short surveys such as the Parent, Pupil and Learner Voice (PPLV) survey (Department for Health and Education, 2015), which captures the perspectives of pupils and parents within education. Current iterations of the survey explore themes such as parental views of the SEND and AP systems and access to specialist support. A future version of the PPLV could incorporate questions about parents' and CYPs' experiences of ARMs. Including such items would provide a broader understanding of how ARMs are facilitated in practice, offering valuable insights into both the effectiveness of the process and the lived experiences of families engaging with it. These data could meaningfully shape policy and practice by ensuring that the voices of parents and CYPs remain central to the evaluation and development of SEND provision.

5.0. Proposed Dissemination

Participants (YP, carers and school staff) who consented to receive follow-up information will be provided with a one-page lay summary outlining the key findings and implications of the project. I

also plan to deliver a small-scale presentation within the setting to further explain the outcomes and ensure that participants have an accessible overview of the research.

I hope that the findings from this project will contribute to the development of clearer guidelines on how YP's views are elicited during the annual review process. The results also highlight the need for renewed discussion around local authority participation in ARMs, particularly given the significance of these meetings for YP who are in care. The overlap between ARMs and other statutory meetings, such as PEPs, contributed to reduced local authority attendance in this study, and future guidance could help clarify expectations and strengthen multi-agency involvement. Looking ahead, I hope to conduct a larger-scale research project to explore national patterns and differences in how ARMs are facilitated, with the aim of contributing to a broader evidence base on effective practice.

This thesis also offers valuable insights for local authorities and has the potential to inform training within Educational Psychology Doctorate programmes. For example, Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) could have a more direct role in contributing to the design and delivery of training sessions. Such collaboration might include introducing tools like Talking Mats and sharing strategies for working with CYP with complex communication needs. Embedding SLT expertise within EP training would support the facilitation of authentic inclusion across schools and colleges, ensuring that approaches to eliciting views are both evidence-based and collaborative. This aligns with Hart's (1992) model of participation, which emphasises the importance of genuine involvement of CYP in decision-making processes. By integrating SLTs' perspectives into educational psychology training, professionals are better equipped to foster inclusive practices that reflect the lived experiences of CYP and their families.

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Appendices

Appendix A-Recruitment Leaflet for Interviews

How do children and young people experience inclusion during their annual review meeting?

You are invited to a research project about gaining your views!

My name is Shaquille Cole. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist and postgraduate researcher at the University of East Anglia.

I am doing a project on annual review meetings. This is because more work needs to be done to make these meetings more inclusive.

What are Annual Review Meetings?

Annual Review Meetings are review meetings for children/young people with an Education Health Care Plan.

At these meetings, we usually discuss:

- How well you are doing at school/college?
- If there are changes needed to support you?
- Views and recommendations
- Any other people that have helped support you
- Changes to goals and outcomes

Why am I researching this area?

In some cases, children's and young people's views are not fully included during their annual review meetings and this may impact decision making about their future

I am interested in finding out about your experiences of your inclusion in the annual review meeting and also any ideas you might have about making future meetings more inclusive.

What is your role in this research study?

I will ask you some questions about the annual review meeting you've had this academic year.

These questions include:

- How were your views collected for your annual review meeting.
- How included you felt in your annual review meeting.
- How do you think future annual review meetings can be more inclusive of children/young people's views.

It will take up to 60 minutes to answer the interview questions.

This will be at your school/college or remotely on Microsoft Teams.

ETH223-218-Project

How do children and young people experience inclusion during their annual review meeting?

If you would like to be involved in this project?

Please read the participant information sheet if you would like to participate in this project.

You may want to discuss it with your parents/carer.

If you decide to take part, please sign and complete the form. I will also need consent from your parent/carers.

Please return your forms to me via email at (shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk)You can also ask me any other questions you may have on this address.

University of East Anglia

ETH223-218-Project

You are invited to a research project about gaining your views!

My name is Shaquille Cole. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist and postgraduate researcher at the University of East Anglia.

I am doing a project on annual review meetings. This is because more work needs to be done to make these meetings more inclusive.

What are Annual Review Meetings?

Annual Review Meetings are review meetings for children/young people with an Education Health Care Plan.

At these meetings, we usually discuss:

- How well you are doing at school/college?
- If there are changes needed to support you?
- Views and recommendations
- Any other people that have helped support you
- Changes to goals and outcomes

Why am I researching this area?

In some cases, children's and young people's views are not fully included during their annual review meetings and this may impact decision making about their future

I am interested in finding out about your experiences of your inclusion in the annual review meeting and also any ideas you might have about making future meetings more inclusive.

What is your role in this research study?

I will ask you some questions about the annual review meeting you've had this academic year.

These questions include:

- How were your views collected for your annual review meeting.
- How included you felt in your annual review meeting.
- How do you think future annual review meetings can be more inclusive of children/young people's views.

It will take up to 60 minutes to answer the interview questions.

This will be at your school/college or remotely on Microsoft Teams.

How do children and young people experience inclusion during their annual review meeting?

If you would like to be involved in this project?

Please read the participant information sheet if you would like to participate in this project.

Please return your forms to me via email at (shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk)You can also ask me any other questions you may have on this address.

University of East Anglia

ETH223-218-Project

Appendix B-Participation Information Sheets

University of East Anglia

02.03.24

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich. NR4 7TJ

Email: shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk

How do children and young people experience inclusion during their annual review meeting when transitioning to post-16 education or employment?

Study Information Sheet

Hello. My name is Shaquille Cole, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist and postgraduate researcher at the University of East Anglia.

- I am doing a research study to learn more about annual review meetings. This is because there needs to be more work to make these meetings more inclusive of children and young people's views.
- I am asking you to be in my study because you have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), and you also have had an annual review meeting this school year.
- You can decide whether you want to participate in the study. It's up to you.

This sheet tells you what I will ask you to do if you decide to take part in this study. Please read it carefully.

If you decide you want to be in the study and then you change your mind later, that's ok. All you need to do is tell me that you don't want to be in the study anymore. You, your parents/carers or someone who looks after you can email me at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk.I will remove any

information you may have already provided, such as your audio recordings and transcriptions from our interview.

If you have any questions, you can speak to me (Shaquille Cole) during the study or your parent/carer. You can contact me at (shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk).

What will happen if I say that I want to be in the study?

If you decide that you want to be in my study, I will ask you to do these things:

- Meet with me at school or online for an interview to find out about your views about your experiences of inclusion at your last annual review meeting.
- I will be the only other person at the interview unless you would like a member of school staff or your parent/carer to come with you.
- You will answer questions about how you felt about your annual review meeting, how your views were gained and how included you felt during the meeting.
- The interview will be face-to-face or remotely via Microsoft Teams at your school/college.
- We will meet once during term time or at a time convenient for you.
- You can choose which questions you want to answer when I ask you questions. If you don't want to talk about something, that's ok. You can stop talking to me at any time if you don't want to talk to me anymore.
- If you say it's ok, I will record what you say with an audio recorder on Microsoft Teams.

Will anyone else know what I say in the study?

- I won't tell anyone else what you say to me, except if you talk about someone hurting you or about you hurting yourself or someone else. Then I might need to tell someone outside of the study to keep you and other people safe.

- All the information that I have about you from the study will be stored in a safe place and I will look after it very carefully.

- I will write a summary of the study and show it to other people, but I won't put your name in the report, and no one will know that you're in the study.

- I may also share your information with other researchers and use it for teaching and outreach purposes, but I will take out your name.

How long will the study take?

- If you would like to take part in this study, you will complete a single interview.
- This interview will take up to 60 minutes to complete.
- This will take place face-to-face at your school/college or remotely via Microsoft Teams.
- We will meet during term-time or another time that works for you.

Are there any good things about being in the study?

- This study can benefit you by your views contributing to wider discussions on supporting children and young people transitioning to college or employment.
- Your views can also help me understand how annual review meetings work at school/college.
- Your views may also help with suggestions to make annual reviews more inclusive of children and young people.

You won't get anything for being in the study, but you will be helping me do my research.

Are there any bad things about being in the study?

- This study will take up some of your time, but I am not expecting it to be bad for you or cost you anything.
- You are unlikely to come to harm since these interviews will be about your strengths.
- If you tell me about something that has or can cause you a risk of harm, I will have to speak to the designated safeguarding lead at your school.

Will you tell me what you learned in the study at the end?

- Yes, I will if you want me to. There is a question on the next page that asks you if you want me to tell you what I learned in the study.
- If you circle Yes, I will tell you what I learned when I finish the study.
- This will be in the form of a One-page lay summary describing what we did and the study's key findings.
- Your parents/carers will be sent a copy of this summary for you to read via email.

What if I am not happy with the study or the people doing the study?

If you are not happy with how I am doing the study or how I treat you, then you, your family or someone who looks after you can:

- Tell me during the study
- Email me shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk
- Contact my supervisor Dr Andrea Honess (A.Honess@uea.ac.uk)
- Email my Head of School, Dr Yann Lebeau (Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk)
-

How do I know that this study is ok to take part in?

All research I undertake is checked and approved by an Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia before I can start it.

What if I want to know more about the information collected on me in the study?

When I talk in the study, I will collect some information which is unique to you. I can only collect this information if I have a reason to do so. My reason to do so for this study is because the study is in the public interest.

This information is stored by me within the University of East Anglia. They help me protect your information and look after it.

If you want to know more about the information collected about you, you can email me at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk or you can email the University's Data Protection Officer

(dataprotection@uea.ac.uk) who helps to protect your information. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) helps to protect everyone's information. If you are unhappy with mine or the University Data Protection Officer's responses about your information, you can speak to the ICO.

Further information

This sheet was last updated on 02.03.24. I will update you if I make any changes to this sheet.

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Participant Consent Form (*First Copy to Researcher*)

If you are happy to be in the study, please:

- **write** your **name** in the space below.
- **sign** your **name** at the bottom of the next page.
- put the **date** at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about and you want to be in it. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the form.

I, ... [PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:

- ✓ I know what the study is about.
- ✓ I know what I will be asked to do.
- ✓ Someone has talked to me about the study.
- ✓ My questions have been answered.
- ✓ I know that I don't have to be in the study if I don't want to.
- ✓ I know that I can pull out of the study at any time if I don't want to do it anymore.
- ✓ I know that I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.
- ✓ I know that the researchers won't tell anyone what I say when I talk to them unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.

Now I am going to ask you to circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell me what you are happy to do or not do in the study.

Are you happy to **speak just to me**? **Yes** **No**

Are you happy for me to **audio record** your voice? **Yes** **No**

Do you want me to tell you what I **learned** in the study? **Yes** **No**

……..... ……

Signature **Date**

Participant Consent Form (*Second Copy to Participant*)

If you are happy to be in the study, please:

- **write** your **name** in the space below.
- **sign** your **name** at the bottom of the next page.
- put the **date** at the bottom of the next page.

You should only say 'yes' to being in the study if you know what it is about and you want to be in it. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the form.

I, ... [PRINT NAME], am happy to be in this research study.

In saying yes to being in the study, I am saying that:

- ✓ I know what the study is about.
- ✓ I know what I will be asked to do.
- ✓ Someone has talked to me about the study.
- ✓ My questions have been answered.
- ✓ I know that I don't have to be in the study if I don't want to.
- ✓ I know that I can pull out of the study at any time if I don't want to do it anymore.
- ✓ I know that I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.
- ✓ I know that the researchers won't tell anyone what I say when I talk to them unless I talk about being hurt by someone or hurting myself or someone else.

Now I am going to ask you to circle 'Yes' or 'No' to tell me what you are happy to do or not do in the study.

Are you happy to **speak just to me**?	**Yes**	**No**
Are you happy for me to **audio record** your voice?	**Yes**	**No**
Do you want me to tell you what I **learned** in the study?	**Yes**	**No**

…….....

…….

Signature **Date**

Shaquille Cole
Postgraduate Researcher

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and
Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

How do children and young people experience inclusion during their annual review meeting when transitioning to post-16 education or employment?

(1) What is this study about?

You have been invited to participate in a research project about the annual review process. This is due to research indicating that this process needs to be more inclusive for children and young people transitioning to post-16 education or employment. This project, therefore, aims to explore the annual review process at your school/college and identify how your pupil was included during their annual review meeting.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a member of staff with pupils aged 14-18 who have Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) at your setting. These pupils have also experienced an annual review meeting this school year.

This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet

carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s): Mr Shaquille Cole.
This will take place under the supervision of Dr Andrea Honess (A.Honess@uea.ac.uk,).

I (Shaquille Cole) am a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia. In this context, I am a postgraduate researcher. I am investigating annual review meetings as they are my area of interest.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

This study will explore how inclusive the annual review process can be for children and young people aged 14-18 with Education Health Care Plans and also what improvements might be made in the future.

You will complete an interview (up to 60 minutes) about your pupil's annual review meeting that occurred up to six months before the planned interview. The interview will be based on your experience attending their annual review meeting, how their views were elicited and

how included they were during the meeting and also any ideas you might have for improvements to the process

These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams. They will take place at your school/college or online via Microsoft Teams during term time or at a time convenient for you.

You will need to tick yes in the consent box at the bottom of this form if you would like for your interviews to be audio-recorded and transcribed.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be involved in one interview that will take up to 60 minutes to complete. This will occur face-to-face at your school/college or remotely via Microsoft Teams during term-term time or at a convenient time for you.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?

Being in this study is entirely voluntary, and you do not have to take part. You can withdraw before, during or after the interview of this research project. Your decision on whether you should participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.

If you decide that you do not want to participate in the study, you can withdraw your consent at any point. You can do this by emailing the author during and after the post-completion of the interviews at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk.

This investigation is not expected to affect the relationship with your school/college, or anyone involved in your pupil's EHCP process.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any audio recordings and transcriptions will be erased, and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results.

You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study, your information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(7)Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, I expect there will be no risks or costs associated with participating in this study. You are unlikely to come to harm in this investigation. However, if you need help completing questions during interviews, you can contact the researcher at any point in this investigation to identify if there can be reasonable adjustments.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

Participating in this study can contribute to the broader understanding of making annual review meetings more inclusive of CYP's views and aspirations.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?

Data from your audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a secure folder on Microsoft OneDrive on Microsoft Teams. For further information, do not hesitate to contact the researcher via email if you wish to access your data.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published and may also be used for other scholarly and educational purposes such as in teaching, but you will not be identified if you decide to participate in this study. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were used. The study findings may be deposited in a repository to allow it to facilitate its reuse. The deposited data will not include your name or any identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Shaquille Cole (shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk) will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study.
You can receive feedback from a One page lay summary. If you would like to receive feedback on your response, feel free to contact the author of this study via email at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk
This feedback will be in the form of a One-page lay summary.
This feedback will be provided at the end of the study, by August 31st 2022.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Shaquille Cole
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk

You can also contact my research supervisor Andrea Honess (A.Honess@uea.ac.uk), if you have any concerns.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning: Yann Lebaeu/Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning (Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk,).

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?

To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You will need to sign the consent form attached to this information sheet. After you complete this form, please return it to the researcher at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk

By submitting your responses, you agree for the researcher to use your data collected for the research project. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information

This information was last updated on 02.03.24

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by email from the researcher at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES ☐ NO ☐

Reviewing transcripts YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

_____

☐ Email: _____

.....

Signature

.....

PRINT name

.....

Date

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES ☐ NO ☐

Reviewing transcripts YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

If you answered **YES**, please provide your email address:

☐ Email: _____

.....

Signature

.....

PRINT name

.....

Date

Shaquille Cole
Postgraduate Researcher

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and
Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park

How do children and young people experience inclusion during their annual review meeting when transitioning to post-16 education or employment?

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?

You have been invited to participate in a research project about the annual review process. I am carrying out this study as previous research suggests that the annual review process needs to be more inclusive for children and young people transitioning to post-16 education or employment. This project, therefore, aims to explore the annual review process at your school/college and identify how your child was included during their annual review meeting.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a parent/carer with a child aged 14-18 who has an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and who has experienced an annual review meeting this school year.

This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s): Mr Shaquille Cole.
This will take place under the supervision of Dr Andrea Honess (A.Honess@uea.ac.uk,).

I (Shaquille Cole) am a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of East Anglia. In this context, I am a postgraduate researcher. I am investigating annual review meetings as they are my area of interest.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

This study will explore how inclusive the annual review process is for children and young people aged 14-18 with Education Health Care Plans and also what improvements might be made in the future.

You will complete an interview (up to 60 minutes) about your child's annual review meeting that occurred up to six months before the planned interview. The interview will be based on your experience attending their annual review meeting, how your child's views were elicited and how included they were during the meeting and also any ideas you might have for improvements to the process

These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams. They will take place at your child's school/college or online via Microsoft Teams during term time or at a time convenient for you.

You will need to tick 'yes' in the consent box at the bottom of this form if you would like for your interviews to be audio recorded and transcribed.

(3)How much of my time will the study take?

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be involved in one interview that will take up to 60 minutes to complete. This will occur face-to-face at your child's school/college or remotely via Microsoft Teams during term-term time or at a convenient time for you.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?

Being in this study is entirely voluntary, and you do not have to take part. You can withdraw before, during or after the interview of this research project. Your decision on whether you should participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.

If you decide that you do not want to participate in the study, you can withdraw your consent at any point. You can do this by emailing the author during and after the post-completion of the interviews at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk.

This investigation is not expected to affect the relationship with your child's school/college or anyone involved in their EHCP process.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any audio recordings and transcriptions will be erased, and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results.

You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study, your information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, I expect there will be no risks or costs associated with participating in this study. You are unlikely to come to harm in this investigation. However, if you need help completing questions during interviews, you can contact the researcher at any point in this investigation to identify if there can be reasonable adjustments.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

Participating in this study can contribute to the broader understanding of making annual review meetings more inclusive of CYP's views and aspirations.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?

Data from your audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a secure folder on Microsoft OneDrive on Microsoft Teams. For further information, do not hesitate to contact the researcher via email if you wish to access your data.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data

Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published and may also be used for other scholarly and educational purposes such as in teaching, but you will not be identified if you decide to participate in this study. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were used. The study findings may be deposited in a repository to allow it to facilitate its reuse. The deposited data will not include your name or any identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Shaquille Cole (shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk) will be available to discuss it further and answer any questions about the study.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study.
You can receive feedback from a One page lay summary. If you would like to receive feedback on your response, feel free to contact the author of this study via email at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk
This feedback will be in the form of a One-page lay summary.
This feedback will be provided at the end of the study, by August 31st 2022.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Shaquille Cole
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk

You can also contact my research supervisor Andrea Honess (A.Honess@uea.ac.uk) if you have any concerns.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning: Yann Lebaeu/Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning (Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk,).

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?

To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You will need to sign the consent form attached to this information sheet. After you complete this form, please return it to the researcher at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk

By submitting your responses, you agree for the researcher to use your data collected for the research project. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information

This information was last updated on 02.03.24

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by email from the researcher at shaquille.cole@uea.ac.uk

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES ☐ NO ☐

Reviewing transcripts YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like **to** receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ NO ☐

✋↗ you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

_____

☐ Email: _____

.....

Signature

.....

PRINT name

.....

Date

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study will be used in the way described in the information sheet.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES ☐ NO ☐

Reviewing transcripts YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

_____

☐ Email: _____

.....

Signature

.....

PRINT name

……

Date

Appendix C-Interview questions

Annual Review Meeting Interview Questions-Children and Young People

1. What has been your experience attending school/college?

How have you enjoyed school

2. How did your school/college collect your views during your annual review meeting?

3. Have your school/college discussed your targets/goals for the year?

4. Have you received any additional help in school/college? If so, what type of help?

5. Have you discussed any plans after you finish school, i.e. Employment or further education?

6. What are your goals and aspirations after you finish school?

7. Did you feel included in the decision-making during your annual review meeting?

8. How do you think future annual review meetings can be inclusive of pupil views?

Are there any questions you would like to ask? Or write about? Friends

9. Any other questions?

Annual Review Meeting Interview Questions-Stakeholders

1. Could you tell me about your experience attending your child/young person/pupil's annual review meeting?

2. What tools did you use to elicit their views?

(How were the tools chosen?) (Were children and young people offered a different method to elicit their views?) (What reasonable adjustments were there?)

3. What aspects of Preparing for Adulthood (Employment, Community Inclusion, Health and Independent Living) were discussed in the meeting?

4. What are the goals/aspirations for the child/young person/pupil?

5. Were the child/young person/pupil's views included in the final decision-making for the annual review meeting?

6. How do you think the annual review meeting process can be more inclusive of your child/young person/pupil's views, particularly in transitioning to post-16 education or employment?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D-Thematic Analysis

Examples of key quotes from interviews

Young Person

Like to be a policeman to get OK all right.

Sort of snack. Will that encourage you to go?

Put it in another student or staff.

Carer Quotes

In fact, I'm sure they are, but again it's me and ***it's not dissimilar*** *to the to the EHCP to be honest, it's just a review making sure he's managed targets, making sure that everyone's doing meet and his needs and and doing the best they can for him really.*

Promoting independence as much as possible, and they're very good at.

And because that they do, they do lots of shopping. They do lots of cooking. They do lots of going out in the community and they're so safe.

I'm not sure. I mean, we could invite him along, but he's got very short attention span and he finds it hard to focus. And when there's a group of people that that he struggles with that as well. That's that he finds it even harder to focus.

So I think what they're actually doing, I don't know how they could make that better without doing what they've already done, to be honest.

The one to one and going through the, you know, the pictures with them, I think, is probably the best way. It's a shame, but yeah.

Like I said earlier, that they send me the paperwork beforehand to read so that I know what's coming up.

We go through and then we go through that together at the meeting.

It's now been a whole school two years. I think the change has done him good.

The change of teachers, he's been able to reinvent himself a bit and his independence and confidence has really grown since being at Eastern Region school.

School Staff Quotes

At the annual review meeting his carer would prefer that he thought he might get a little bit anxious seeing him at school. Oh, yeah. However, he was involved in some of the preparation that I do leading up to.

So he will sit alongside myself when I'm doing the form. I will read the questions site to him and I will support him and explain it simply so he understands so he can answer. So Jamie was able to tell me who he lives with. He's able to tell me who he is. Who his friends are.

Whether he really understands the gravity of that, but he will answer so he was involved in every part of that process.

Health and care it's little different to a currency. Yeah. OK, so the first thing to say is the original plan for the HCP is when the legislation came in, it was meant to be a single point of contact from multi agency working. It doesn't work. OK. OK. You told me a little bit more about the local authority. They have to turn up.

Health never turn up can never turn up. They're always invited. So basically it's parent and school.

Appendix E-Initial Thesis Codes Keys

Ambiguity/Uncertainty

Anxiety

Communication

Education/Employment

Adaptability

Mental Capacity/

Multi-agency involvement

Education/Employment

Knowledge/Information Gathering

Appendix F-Examples of Codes in key quotes:

It's usually done in **pictures because** **that's his better way of communication.**

Jamie wasn't present, but they did. He struggles with things like that anyway because of his capacity.

No, it's like, do you know the programme, **the widget programme?**

It's usually done around that sort of format.

past, we have had social workers present, yeah.
But to be honest, that the social work is usually just come to the PEP (Personal Education Plan) meetings.

Personal education plan meeting.
But that, yeah, **they can be yearly. Sometimes they're six monthly**, depending on what's going on at school and how well Jamie is getting on. I

In fact, I'm sure they are, but again it's me and **it's not dissimilar** to the to the EHCP to be honest, it's just a review making sure he's managed targets, making sure that everyone's doing meet and his needs and and doing the best they can for him really.

Yeah. So the **social workers or the local authority get more involved in that than they do**.
In my experience the EHCP.

And as I understand it, obviously I'm not there when they **do it on a one to one basis, which Jamie copes with a lot better.** So I think they just I think they did **quite relaxed not** too formal with him because he wouldn't respond well to that. And I think it's just more have a chat about what his aspirations are and.

It's usually done in **pictures because** **that's his better way of communication**.

So in sixth form, our students are involved in their personal profile. Oh, yeah. So that involves them telling us what their main motives are, what they like, what they dislike.
So he will sit alongside myself when I'm doing the form. I will read the questions site to him and I will support him and explain it simply so he understands so he can answer. So Jamie was able to tell me who he lives with. He's able to tell me who he is. Who his friends are.

Whether he really understands the gravity of that, but he will answer so he was involved in every part of that process.

With Jamie he has already visited one of the local colleges, he's got two more years. No, another year after this one. So he's already he is involved in that process with his list. His voices listened to about which college he prefers and and why.

The actual the conversation more about his future. **He's had mental capacity tests on for finance. OK, then it's been proved that actually he doesn't have that capacity to do that so.**

As his PFA file work that's been taken over and Jamie was involved and was told. That Jamie's money would be looked after. And he very much knew that he would ask his parents.

So I'm not allowed to do mental capacity tests myself. OK. But that is people work that came in.

Of course. Explaining it in his language and understanding.

And it became clear that Jamie, he doesn't have an understanding of money concepts in real contextual terms.
But he was happy for consent to be given for something. Yeah. And he felt, yeah. Take care about that. OK. Thank you for that. And in terms of like his.

I've only been caring for the two girls since January, so this was my first.

There's been a lot of changes with Jessy since January because I've I've found out that before January she would hardly talk to anybody.

Well, they will show me all the evidence of the work she's done evidence of.

obviously Jessy is still quite nonverbal about what's been happening, although she is getting better.
There was her, a teacher and a one of the teacher assistants. That was myself. And there was the support lady who kind of overseas, a lot of the pastoral support for all the children, all the young people there.

Dad and Class Teacher attend the meeting

Don't we? We talked about your target. What do you want to do when you leave school calling? Ask college. Where do you want to work?
I work in Tesco's.
But Liam is really sure that he wants to work on a shop.
He's really clearly wants to work and his pathway is really place of work.

Health and care it's little different to a currency. Yeah. OK, so the first thing to say is the original plan for the EHCP is when the legislation came in, it was meant to be a single point of contact from multi agency working. It doesn't work. OK. OK. You told me a little bit more about the local authority. They have to turn up.
Health never turn up can never turn up. They're always invited. So basically it's parent and school.

So essentially we do that anyway. I have regular contact with the parents and essentially it's no different to that. The only role the local authority really do is

is that they are gatekeepers for the paperwork, and my experience is that that is done ineffectively.
Because I'm invested in these. Like, if we look at the EHCP it's sure and make changes based on the learners changing presentations. **They develop the changes we recommended are never incorporated in the document.**

So we end up with a document that's out of date and whilst the learner is continuing within a single school, that's not the hugest problem in the world, but when the learner transitions that document, that's the legal document. Yeah. Yeah. So, so that, that's tprobably the problem.

So in terms of running the meetings because I'm the only game there, you know, my experience with them is governed by my competence, quality of the relationship with parents.
And the extent to which I've been able to develop collaborative, collegial, working between parents and school.

And not I'm talking about. So, so that's fine. So in this particular case, it's fine. I've worked hard to keep the Liams dad on side, and it's a good fellow and everything is smooth. And the learners make a good progress.

Learners, they have complex communication needs, some have no speech. Liam does have some speech. I think that what's really important in getting Liam's views is to have a long process.

How the learners need a Longview. **The best tool is that we use is we use constructions. So when people finish that much, we always have a chat about a particular topic. That's what we do around the table.**

So what we will do when we want to elicit Liam's views over a period of about two or three weeks and what we're using it for other learners as well, we'll discuss things over a series of days.And thinking develops.

They process slowly, they think slowly, and if you discuss the same things five days in a row, you're going to get much more valid response on day five than you've had on day one.

Yeah, so this is what we do. So we will discuss things they don't know they're being asked to fill in a form.But we are just.Recording their words. And so for Liam's review I was able to submit the my views sheet.

That were all through all through, all of Liam's words. Now, if they've come into a meeting and people ask the question, you can't answer, the sport is processing is, not suitable for that.
And that's the process I use that we'll talk about with other learners.

It's much harder if they have no expressive language because you're using symbolic and probably symbolic communication is operates within a frame that I'm creating.

He actually got a long process. If you want something about it, you need to put time and effort into it. You can either have quick or you can have good.

You know. The point about special education is they're not special in the same way.
So it's very different.

So if I have a what we would call a pre formal learner, someone who is to say we don't use mental age because only would say we might say someone who's operating within the first two years of their life, they're never going to develop language, they're expressing communication, never really goes beyond their basic needs.

Apparel life, such as it is i.e. life skills. Is delivered to all our learners according to level.

So again we're going to do benchmarks as you as you know. So what does that look like for some of our learners? It looks like drama.

I was. I took my class to royal show the other day. Oh, yeah, yeah. And we went in the tent for city holidays.

And for us, that was got to be that smart work because this is where people come. Yeah. And there was a little store for class education, but we looked at that. That's what we do.

It's very hard because our learn learners generally experience the world through their immediate sensory experiences.

And as soon as you start talking about conceptual stuff and time is inherently conceptual. Yeah, as soon as you start talking about what comes next. Well, I'm in now, you're scuppered.

So how do you make that rich? So we use loads of drama? Yeah. Loads of loads and loads. That's the way in which we explore it. We we do. We're fortunate in our class. We're doing lots and lots of travel training.

Everyone has to work. Mm hmm. Everyone has to make a contribution. Those contributions may look different. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But everyone very good language that you use there as well. Yeah.

We've discussed Gatsby benchmarks. Yeah, we'll discuss what is capable in terms of independent living, there are issues. I've discussed his goals and aspirations. He wants to work. He wants to work in shop.

Example theme with codes:

Health and care it's little different to a currency. Yeah. OK, so the first thing to say is the original plan for the EHCP is when the legislation came in, it was meant to be a single point of contact from multi agency working. It doesn't work. OK. OK. You told me a little bit more about the local authority. They have to turn up.
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