

**Using a sociocultural framework to explore the experiences  
of visually impaired young people who leave school;  
their transition experiences, feelings of independence  
and sense of identity during the transition process:  
an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Whilst there is a reasonable research evidence base concerning the experiences of visually impaired young people during their compulsory education and in terms of their subsequent employment prospects, there is a paucity of evidence examining the transitions between these two elements of the lived experience of these young people, including their perceptions of their levels of independence and self-identity during transition.

A sociocultural framework was utilised to explore the experiences of five young people with a visual impairment who had experienced challenges during their respective transition journeys from compulsory education into further education, training, employment and unemployment. Following in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants themes were identified relating to the young people's transition experiences, feelings of independence and sense of identity during the transition process and were explored using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Findings suggested that the young people participating in this research were largely content with the support that they received during their compulsory education but felt in need of greater levels of support in terms of developing resilience, self-advocacy skills, problem-solving and assertiveness in achieving a successful transition into further education, vocational training and employment and avoiding becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET).

This research is set within a social and political context of high levels of unemployment amongst young people in the United Kingdom and even higher levels

of unemployment amongst young people with disabilities and specifically those with a visual impairment.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Rationale

This thesis is written in part requirement toward the Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology.

The introduction to this thesis outlines the focal point and rationale for the research. In addition the primary aims are considered, with an introduction to the relevant debates and research studies from literature relating to the focus of the research domain introduced.

The focus of this research emerged from my own involvement with the Transitions Project, a longitudinal study conducted by the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham in conjunction with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and more recently the Nuffield Foundation.

I have been a member of the research team since 2010, playing a relatively minor role in attending some Transition Project meetings and contributing to data gathering in phase 1 of the study through telephone interviews, for example, and assisting in the writing of a technical report for the Project in 2011 (Hewett et al. 2011).

The rationale of the research is to consider the transition experiences of blind and partially sighted (visually impaired) young people leaving compulsory education and entering into further education, higher education, training, employment or unemployment as part of an extensive 5+ year longitudinal study of transition experiences of visually impaired young people. The Transition Project (2010-2015) uses the term “visually impaired young people” predominantly when considering

those young people who are participating in the longitudinal research and uses this terminology in its numerous publications to date. In the interests of clarity and consistency the account of this research will use the same terminology.

## **1.2 Research Strategy**

A comprehensive, systematic search strategy employing Boolean logic was employed to gain access to a wide range of authoritative, relevant and current sources of research that relate to the subject area of this research study.

Utilising the University of Birmingham eLibrary service, research articles for the literature review were identified using a wide range of data bases and major bibliographical search engines that included PsychInfo, PsycOVID, SwetsWise, EBSCO, ASSIA and ERIC.

The majority of the sources identified originated from the UK, with a fewer number from the USA and Australia. Clear preference was given to sources 15 years old or less.

Search terms used included transition, educational transition, visual impairment, post-16 years, identity, independence and socio-cultural theory. Of the over 300 studies related to the broad area that were identified the majority had to be discarded as they were judged to be lacking relevance to the area of specific research.

The “snowball” technique was used to follow up the references that were cited in the bibliographies of relevant articles.

In addition other sources were discovered, using the same approaches and terminologies noted above, in literature from relevant charitable and third sector

bodies concerning visually impaired young people, as well as government policies, guidance and statistics.

### **1.3 Research Context**

The Transitions project longitudinal study has had two distinct phases. The current phase of the project, phase 2, is operating between 2012 and 2015 and is investigating the transition of visually impaired young people from the age of 14 years of age until they enter employment, further education or other destinations. This phase of the project is also identifying the roles of professionals involved in the transition process and aims to highlight those components that enhance or detract from a young person's chances of becoming employed.

Using a case study approach this particular contribution to the overall Transitions Project longitudinal study sets out to research how visually impaired young people perceive their own transition experiences after leaving compulsory education by utilising a sociocultural framework; how they view their own levels of independence and their sense of identity with particular regard to their experiences of transition from compulsory education and their future education, employment and training options. This will be sought by gathering retrospective and current reported experiences and the future aspirations of a group of visually impaired young people, through the use of semi-structured interviews with the application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) within a sociocultural framework. It is envisaged that this will illuminate the experiences of transition encountered by the participants whose career pathways are uncertain following transition from school or sixth form

college, with possible pathway options including further education, employment, training or becoming not in education, employment or training; known as being “NEET”. The preparedness for transition to further education, employment or training, and the perceived sense of independence and self-identity during this process will be key areas of focus during individual interviews. It is also envisaged that this will reveal some of the complexities of the transition process experienced by participants, as well as providing important new learning concerning perceptions of independence and identity held by this group of visually impaired young people. Exploration of psychological theories relating to transition, self-identity and independence within a sociocultural framework amongst the population of visually impaired young people is also envisaged.

#### **1.4 Justification for the Research**

Whilst there is a reasonable research evidence base concerning the experiences of visually impaired young people during their compulsory education (Morris et al., 2008; Hewett et al., 2010) and in terms of their subsequent employment prospects (Douglas et al., 2006; Douglas et al., 2009), a paucity of evidence has examined the transitions between these two elements of the lived experience of these young people, including their perceptions of their levels of independence and self-identity during transition.

This research is set within a social and political context of high levels of unemployment amongst young people in the United Kingdom and even higher levels of unemployment amongst young people with disabilities and specifically those with a visual impairment, as noted by Douglas et al. (2009) and more recently Douglas et

al. (2014). Cavanaugh and Geisen (2012) in their research from the USA echoed UK findings in noting that recent data from the US Current Population Survey identified significant and substantial gaps in employment rates between visually impaired young people and sighted peers in the general population, with some 19.8% of visually impaired young people aged 16-19 years employed in comparison to 29.2% of same age sighted young people. The gap noted above becomes more pronounced in terms of young people aged between 20 and 24 years old, with some 39.5% of visually impaired young people employed in comparison to 63.8% of sighted young people (Capella McDonnall, 2011).

Phase 1 of the Transitions Project longitudinal study between 2010 and 2012 led to some expressions of concern on the part of both participants and involved professionals regarding transition arrangements prior to leaving compulsory education, notably in terms of whether transition procedures were being properly adhered to by schools and local authorities (Hewett et al., 2010; Hewett et al., 2011). The impact of this needs further investigation and this study offers a case study approach to address some of these concerns.

Research that addresses these anomalies and is related to opportunities for visually impaired young people achieving economic independence is worthy of pursuit. In addition attention should be paid to a more general political policy agenda to seek and to include the voice of young people in issues that relate to them.

The proposed thesis will aim to investigate transition amongst this population and to examine the constructs of independence and identity in this context within a sociocultural framework. More specifically a group of young people who have been part of the Transitions Project from the outset have been identified as experiencing

challenging transitions from the end of compulsory education. A relatively small number of these young people agreed to take part in additional research activities to develop a rich, qualitative picture of their experiences in order to inform the Transitions Project findings as a whole.

### **1.5 Key Research Aims**

After conducting a literature review and following analysis of sociocultural theory relating to transition from compulsory education to other destinations amongst visually impaired young people, two broad research aims have been formulated.

#### **Aim 1:**

To explore the process of transition from compulsory education to other destinations within a group of visually impaired young people who have experienced disrupted and challenging journeys after leaving school.

#### **Aim 2:**

To illuminate the views of individuals who have experienced transition, consider their own perceptions of the development of their independence and identity as a result of transition and identify enablers and barriers to success in this process.

### **1.6 Researcher Perspective**

I have had substantial professional involvement in the area of visual impairment for over 25 years, having trained to be a specialist teacher of visually impaired children in 1987, working as an advisory teacher with visually impaired young people in local authority settings and taking on a professional specialism in visual impairment as an

educational psychologist since 2000. My work with visually impaired young people and their families has led to a particular interest in later life opportunities for this group of learners beyond formal schooling, into further education, higher education, training, employment or unemployment.

Indeed I recall vividly working as part of a team of professionals with a young man who was blind, providing a high level of support for him and his teachers at school and then referring him to a specialist vocational college. Some years later it was discovered that the young person had returned to live with his family and had been unemployed since leaving college with few qualifications. On meeting him again he seemed thoroughly demotivated in terms of finding further education or training opportunities and clearly stated that he was resigned to a life of unemployment.

This experience and others like it as a specialist teacher and educational psychologist led to an interest in becoming involved in 2010 with the Transitions Project.

### **1.7 The Transitions Project**

As noted above, this is a two phase 5 year research study into the transition experiences of 80 visually impaired young people from school into further education, higher education, training, employment or unemployment (Hewett et al., 2010; Hewett et al., 2011). Phase 1 of the project between 2010 and 2012 involved recruiting two distinct groups of visually impaired young people in 2009 when they were in National Curriculum school age groups Year 9 and Year 11 respectively. The groups have been interviewed on at least three occasions during the three year first

phase of the project with questions focussing on the young people's plans, progress, support and general circumstances.

The current phase of the project, phase 2, follows the two groups for a further three years up to 2015, with an emphasis on tracking the young people's progress as they move from compulsory educational contexts into settings where they are encouraged to seek pathways to employment. The purpose of the project is primarily to understand the very low levels of employment amongst visually impaired young people by tracking the transition process for the two cohorts in a longitudinal study and to identify factors that increase or decrease young people's experience of successful transition and thereby to generate relevant, evidence-based theories and recommendations for visually impaired young people and involved stakeholder professionals.

The research project designed in 2009 identified three separate pieces of research; recruitment of participants and survey of education services; survey of visually impaired young people and longitudinal case studies. This research will contribute to the last area of research identified, case studies.

A report "Post-14 transitions support – a survey of visiting teacher services for visually impaired students" produced by VICTAR (Hewett et al., 2010) presented data with regard to the first phase of research outlined above, a survey of education services and notably the transition planning provided to visually impaired students from the chronological age of 14 to 16 years (school Years 9, 10 and 11). The transition planning provided for visually impaired students was identified by RNIB as a major concern following a number of significant studies and research (Douglas et al., 2006; Keil et al., 2008; Douglas et al., 2009).

Transition as a concept is viewed by the project team as a continual process rather than a series of connected or unconnected episodes and a strong case for developing the research into phase 2 of the project is motivated by a desire on the part of the project team to illuminate the transition experiences of visually impaired young people from compulsory schooling into further education, higher education, training and employment; to identify enablers and barriers to successful transition from compulsory education to employment via a range and variety of routes or journeys (Hewett et al., 2011).

Findings from phase 1 of the project were largely positive, with the majority of participants reporting that they felt well supported in terms of their educational provision and that they felt well prepared for the transition-related changes they had experienced, often involving a change in educational context from school into Sixth Form College or into Further Education College (Hewett et al., 2011)

Within Phase 1 of the project concerns were identified regarding support for transition with respect to ambiguities related to transition reviews and transition plans, processes embedded within the statutory transition process for young people with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Confusion was identified concerning whether young people believed that they had received a transition plan prior to leaving school and whether the transition review process had been conducted appropriately. A feeling of not always being properly consulted within expected process parameters was expressed by some participants. This was an area considered to be worthy of further investigation in phase 2 of the project, as were other matters including how the then imminent rise in university tuition fees would influence those young people intending to study at university. This is of relevance to the focus of the project because visually impaired young people experience a

marked decline in employment as their level of academic attainment reduces in comparison to same-age sighted peers. In addition very few of the cohort had experienced paid part time work, although a majority had completed school-organised work experience (Hewett et al., 2010; Hewett et al., 2011; Keil et al., 2008). Research has demonstrated that for visually impaired young people, prior work experience has been vital in gaining employment (Douglas et al., 2009; Keil et al., 2008; Meager et al., 2008).

Further findings of note from phase 1 of the project were the reliance many young people had on others to transport them to school or college, possibly forming a barrier to achieving greater levels of independence. Additionally the successful access many project participants had achieved using social network sites provided optimistic evidence that visually impaired young people have increased opportunities of social engagement, often a key enabler to successful social introductions when attending new contexts such as university and employment.

The primary outcomes of phase 1 of the project are outlined in Hewett et al.'s (2010) survey of providers of educationally-based services to visually impaired young people. In the context of the transition process the survey emphasises the complexity of transition planning at this juncture in the lives of young people. Results of this survey clearly suggested that service providers felt that support for transition in terms of linking schools with Connexions Services needed further development, although as a counter balance to this concern the visually impaired young people in the Year 11 cohort reported (Hewett et al., 2011) that they had felt well supported during their compulsory education studies. However, there were some issues of concern related to the reduced levels of experience within this group of doing part time jobs, compared to sighted peers. Transition processes following sixth form

studies or placement at further education colleges were viewed by service providers as being open to criticism and concerns, with the independence skills of young people a specific area of anxiety to involved professionals (Hewett et al., 2011).

It is a key task within the current phase 2 of the Transitions Project to ascertain if young people continue to feel positive about and well prepared for their transition experiences. The research evidence base identifying and analysing the destinations of visually impaired young people on leaving compulsory education is weak. One reason for this is the small number of visually impaired young people between the ages 16-25 who need specialist support in educational contexts; Morris and Smith (2008) identified that they represent some 0.2% of this population of young people. In contrast there is research data for visually impaired people of working age related to employment status; evidence points to very low rates of employment suggesting 30% of the population of visually impaired people in stark comparison to 75% of the sighted adult population in employment (Douglas et al., 2006; 2009; Hewett and Douglas, 2011).

Within the age group 18-29 years some 40% of visually impaired people are categorised as “not in education, employment or training”, commonly known as NEET (Douglas et al., 2009). The Network 1000 project (Douglas et al., 2009) found that only a third of adults (post 16 years of age) registered as blind or partially sighted were employed, with long term unemployment a growing risk factor for those people without work soon after leaving school. Research by Meager and Carta (2008), Douglas et al. (2009) and Capella McDonnall (2011) from the USA identified enablers to this population securing employment as including good educational attainment, independence skills including mobility and living skills and adept social networking, alongside positive employer attitudes.

There is a significant lack of research that considers the pathways encountered by visually impaired young people leaving formal education into further education, training contexts and employment; notably much of the research referred to above relates to visually impaired adults. A longitudinal study conducted by Aston et al. (2005) of young people with a range of special educational needs outlined a picture of young people attending a variety of sometimes unrelated educationally-based courses, engaging in temporary periods of work and becoming NEET for other periods of time. Prior to the commencement of the Transitions Project (Hewett et al., 2010), research by Keil and Crews (2008) identified similar patterns of activity and unemployment within the population of visually impaired young people.

### **1.8 Conceptual Framework and Methodological Orientation**

The research will be conceptualised within a framework of sociocultural theory and will employ interpretative phenomenological analysis and the use of case studies to examine the experiences of transition from compulsory education to a range of educational, training and employment based destinations amongst a group of visually impaired young people. Transition will be explored and understood within a sociocultural framework, as outlined by Crafter and Maunder (2012). Using a sociocultural framework in this way connects the thoughts and actions of people experiencing transition within a social and cultural context; for example, a change in self-identity emanating from elements of uncertainty and inconsistency in the social and cultural life of the person is posited.

In terms of the case study work undertaken within this branch of the overall research, the project places value on tracking the participants as their transition journeys

proceed and to this end case studies of the experiences of individual participants is viewed as valuable in gaining a greater understanding of the transition experiences of individuals. In this way case studies of typical and less typical transition journeys experienced by participants are envisaged by both this research and the Transitions Project team and the Project steering group.

In terms of approach and methodology, Phase 2 of the project recognises the value of collecting additional data in a standardised way, as was particularly the case in phase 1 of the project, yet at the same time this phase of the research privileges qualitative approaches in order to gain rich insights into the lived experiences of transition by visually impaired individuals. The interviews with the young people that are envisaged for this research study will enable and encourage participant-centred exploration of themes and areas that are of significance to individual young people, with the case study approach facilitating this theme.

In discussing methodological orientation my own epistemological and ontological position will be outlined in terms of how this has influenced the development of research questions and influenced both how the methods have been chosen and the analysis of derived data. Following this the contexts and settings where the research occurred will be considered, in conjunction with ethical dilemmas. This discussion will also address reliability and validity concerns within the context of this research study, alongside the significance of reflexivity.

It is important for the researcher to establish a clear rationale for both the methodology chosen and the method utilised for a research project. Within the sphere of social research, multiple methodologies and methods can be chosen by a researcher, with a sound and carefully constructed theoretical foundation essential.

Significantly in this context, Silverman (2000) identifies that it is methodology that underpins a research strategy, with the chosen methodology usually heavily influenced by the choice of research questions that are ultimately formulated to respond to a concern that has become of focus of the researcher's attention.

### **1.9 An original contribution to knowledge and theory development?**

As noted, there is useful and relevant research that provides insights into the experiences of visually impaired young people within compulsory education settings and later on within employment contexts, notably by Meager and Carta (2008), Douglas et al. (2009) and Capella McDonnal (2011). However, little is known about the transition process that occurs between these two elements of young people's lives. Indeed the lack of knowledge surrounding transition between attending compulsory educational provision and later employment outcomes inspired the development of the 5 year longitudinal project between the RNIB, the Nuffield Foundation and the University of Birmingham to track young people's progress through these transition journeys.

More specifically a paucity of research examines the transition experiences of visually impaired young people within a sociocultural framework focussing on self-identity and perceptions of independence.

It is anticipated that the development of theory and generation of knowledge produced by this study will add substantially to understanding the transition journeys visually impaired young people experience, the barriers that face them and how these can be addressed successfully. It is also envisaged that a further consequence of this study's outcomes will be that service providers, policy development and

indeed young people and their families can in future be better informed and practically supported through this transition.

The practice of professionals working with this population of young people, including educational psychologists, should be enhanced by the findings of this study, specifically through listening to the voices of young people experiencing challenging transition journeys and thereby promoting anti-oppressive and ethical engagement with this group of potentially vulnerable young people.

**The distinctness of this study compared to the larger Transitions Project is that it considers in qualitative depth the lived experience of a small sample of visually impaired young people who have been involved with the Transitions Project from its inception using a sociocultural framework and case studies. The voice of the young people who volunteered to contribute to this research is privileged in this regard. The purposive sample had reported to the Transitions Project team challenging transition experiences following their compulsory education and I expressed an interest in discussing their respective transition journeys with participants in-depth via semi-structured interviews. The Transitions Project Steering Group agreed to me undertaking this research as a related but independent piece of work. As an Educational Psychologist it is a significant part of my professional role to work with young people who are potentially vulnerable and to conduct research from which learning can occur. The data gathered during interviews was then analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis from which superordinate themes, themes and sub-themes were identified relating to the young people's transition experiences.**

**I was aware of the paucity of research examining the transition experiences of visually impaired young people between compulsory education and in terms of their subsequent employment prospects, including their perceptions of their levels of independence and self-identity during transition, and this adds to the distinctness of this piece of research.**

The essentially idiographic, inductive and iterative focus of this research also marks its distinctness and relative independence from the Transition Project, whilst at the same time hopefully contributing positively to the Project's overall findings.

### **1.10 Reporting of Research Findings**

Research findings will be reported within this thesis and findings will also be reported to the Transitions Project steering group and will contribute to the project's overall findings through publication in academic and professional journals. Dissemination of research findings will occur within my own educational psychology service and at designated training events.

### **1.11 Thesis Structure**

In the second chapter of this thesis, a Review of Literature will be presented in the context of the research domain, providing an in-depth analysis of the primary areas of debate. The study will also be considered in terms of its context and psychologically-based theories relating to visual impairment, transition, independence and identity, with a theoretical framework for the investigation outlined.

The third chapter of the thesis, Methodology, will outline the research questions, consider the rationale for the chosen methodology, the theoretical framework being employed and research design, with discussion focussing on a justification for the use of the chosen methodology and research design in the context of the research proposal.

The fourth chapter will consider research Findings and Discussion. In this chapter findings will be discussed alongside emerging issues, referring to the research questions and relevant literature considered in the second chapter, as well as highlighting areas not previously identified in the research corpus. There will also be a discussion of the extent to which the contribution of the research findings addressed the research aims and research questions in the concluding chapter.

The fifth chapter, the Conclusion, will summarise the research, reflect on the findings and consider the study's limitations alongside implications for the professional practice of educational psychologist and other involved professionals.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will present a critical and focused review of the literature that relates to educational transitions for visually impaired young people who are leaving compulsory education, within a sociocultural framework.

Initially a conceptualisation of transition will be presented, within a sociocultural framework, with the purpose of exploring the experiences of young people. Transitions as consequential, transition rupture and identity change and transitions within communities of practice will then be discussed.

This review of literature will be developed by consideration of research into transitions from compulsory education contexts as they apply to visually impaired young people, with a particular emphasis on the development of independence and identity. In addition, the concept of becoming NEET will be explored alongside the developing policy and legislative context.

At the conclusion of this chapter research questions will be identified and consideration given to how the research design will be generated in relation to the substantive and theoretical areas discussed in the review of literature.

### **2.2 Transition in Education**

This section of the literature review is divided into the following sections:

1. Transition – a conceptualisation

2. Transition – applying a sociocultural framework to explore the experiences of visually impaired young people.
3. Summary and Conclusion.

### **2.2.1 Transition – a conceptualisation**

In its most general sense, transition is a term signifying “fundamental features of social life” (Field, Preface in Ecclestone, 2010) and it is viewed as “one of the defining characteristics of everyday life in what has variously been called late modernity, second modernity or even postmodernity” (Field, Preface in Ecclestone, 2010). As Ecclestone et al. (2010) note, because the notion of transitions operates within a range of contexts both theoretical and practical, an agreed definition of what transition is differs enormously.

Lam and Pollard (2006) view transition as both a process of change and a shift from one identity to another, summarising that “it is usually a time of intense and accelerated development demands that are socially regulated.” (p.125). Crafter and Maunder (2012) view transition as signalling a “change in self-identity born out of uncertainty in the social and cultural worlds of the individual.”(p.10).

Transition is often characterized as forms of change. The study of both stability and change have been significant features within the study of psychology. The notion of transition has been explored by several influential figures including James (1890), Erikson (1975) and Piaget (1976). These three figures have investigated transition in relation to self (James, 1890)), transition with regard to moments of crises (Erikson, 1975)), and perhaps most markedly, transition in terms of conceptualizing disequilibrium (Piaget, 1976). Each of these three perspectives posits that change

occurs due to an outside or external influence, for example a social situation. This external force seemingly has the power to alter understandings of the self. The transition phase that is often of particular interest is the transition of adolescents from a school or college environment, into employment. In addition to this environmental change, the transition phase is likely to have added significance to young people with special educational needs, and other disabilities such as visual impairment (Keil et al., 2008). Crafter & Maunder (2012) argue that the most effective way in which to explore transitions, is to take into account the social and cultural situatedness of human thought and action. In this sense we see transitions as complex phases involving multiple changes. Transitions are multi-faceted by nature and rather than viewing them as moving from one physical location to the next (e.g. from school, to a job), we view them as intertwined with our sense of self and sense of identity. Changes that occur during transition periods occur through an uncertainty within the social and cultural worlds of the individual (Crafter & Maunder, 2012).

### **2.2.2 Transition – applying a sociocultural framework to explore the experiences of visually impaired young people**

In this section of the literature review key research evidence that considers the transition of young people from education to employment using a sociocultural framework will be considered, relating it to the lived experience of those visually impaired young people.

Crafter and Maunder (2012) discuss how Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory offers a useful framework for looking at transitions across various practices, institutions and contexts. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is based on the

principle that as children develop, they reconstruct cultural knowledge from previous generations of communities they belong to. This foundation assumes that a child's development is not a singular maturation process but is tied to cultural and historical bases. For example, parents often adopt practices that their own parents used with them; these practices are then recreated across generations.

Sociocultural theory can be applied to examine routine activities that occur as part of our everyday life, for example going to school. These everyday activities, according to Vygotsky are all influenced by the history of communities and individuals. For Vygotsky and other sociocultural theorists, psychological processes are developed through participation and engagement in socially organized activities. There is an emphasis on the interaction between the individual, their way of thinking and their cultural, historical and institutional settings. Therefore when exploring transitions within a sociocultural framework, there is an assumed negotiation between the individual and the social contexts they occupy (Crafter & Maunder, 2012).

By looking at transitions through a sociocultural lens, we are able to better understand how transitions are periods of change for an individual, and perhaps a more complex period of change than initially assumed. Gorgorio et al. (2002) argue that 'transition' is not simply a moment of change, but an experience of changing. Individuals experience discontinuities between different social and cultural contexts. We therefore need to view the concept of a 'transition' as a plural concept rather than a singular one. Gorgorio et al. (2002) argue that transitions arise from the individual's need to live, cope and participate in different contexts and to face different challenges. In this sense individuals going through a transition phase are faced with adapting to new social and cultural experiences. The manner in which

individuals adapt to and navigate different contexts and challenges can therefore determine whether they experience a positive or negative transition.

Hviid & Zittoun (2008) discuss two leading approaches to studying transitions; by looking at the outcomes of the transition process and examining the process of transition. The first measures for example the well-being of the individual before and after the move from school to employment. The second views transition more generally as a catalyst for change. There exist many studies exploring outcomes of the transition process, but less looking at the actual process itself.

Crafter & Maunder (2012) outline three frameworks for studying transitions using a sociocultural framework, including transitions as consequential, transitions involving ruptures and identity change, and transitions within communities of practice. Each of these frameworks will be explored in relation to the transition of young people between education and employment with special reference to visually impaired young people.

### **2.2.3 Frameworks for Studying Transitions Using a Sociocultural Framework**

#### **1. Transitions as consequential**

Crafter & Maunder (2012) argue that transitions take different forms and have some impact or consequence on the individual and their external environment and can therefore be viewed as consequential. One theorist who studies transition as consequential in this respect is Beach (1999) who studied the transition of knowledge from one setting to another. Beach (1999) questioned whether the skills individuals learn within an educational setting transfer to their new context of employment, arguing that transitions are consequential in terms of the impact they

have on the individual and the social context they inhabit. Beach (1999) describes a consequential transition as a “conscious reflective struggle to reconstruct knowledge, skills and identity in ways that are consequential to the individual becoming someone or something new” (p.30).

It could be hypothesised that a reconstruction of identity in this sense is likely to be a much more significant factor for individuals with special educational needs or visual impairment, given the challenges they already might face in accessing learning or social interaction at a level of equality to their non-disabled peers. In addition to this, it is likely that specific skills acquired and utilised to deal with one environment are likely to change in another environment and therefore may not prove easily adaptable or useful in the new context.

In this context Beach (1999) describes four different forms of consequential transition; lateral transitions, collateral transitions, encompassing transitions and mediation transitions. With reference to this assignment’s focus on the transition period experienced by young people moving from education to employment, the first form of transition, lateral transition, is perhaps of direct interest and relevance. Beach (1999) describes lateral transitions as involving an individual moving between two historically related activities in a single direction, for example moving from primary school to secondary school or from school or college to employment. This lateral transition involves one activity being replaced by participation in the other activity. Beach adds that this transition tends to involve an element of developmental progression from one context to the next.

Beach (1999) also considers what he terms mediational transitions and these are of relevance with reference to young people moving from compulsory education to

employment. He describes mediational transitions as transitions that occur within educationally-based activities that project or simulate involvement in an activity that is yet to be fully experienced. For example, this form of transition might involve receiving lessons involving career advice, learning how to apply for jobs, and exploiting opportunities to gain work experience whilst still at school.

Beach (1999) explains how each of these transitions has the potential to produce some sort of change in the identity of the individual, with this change occurring via personal reflection and the individual making sense of the transition itself. Change can happen through multiple forms, as highlighted earlier, and transition as a process should be viewed as multiple rather than a singular shift from one place to the next. It is posited that change can be perceived in the form of gaining and constructing new knowledge or alternatively the adaptation and variation of old skills or even learning completely new skills.

In this respect individuals can experience changes in their identity or in fact a change in social position. Again here the multifaceted nature of transition and the various effects it can have on an individual's identity can be evident. In addition to the idea of a transfer of knowledge, Beach (1999) identifies how transition involves a reconstruction of what individuals do and this is where the process of development becomes clear, and is often associated with personal progress. In the context of young people's transition from education to employment, especially those with special educational needs and visual impairment, transfer of knowledge is likely to be more challenging due to their additional needs. This might be in terms of specialist equipment and a need for some form of supplementary support, but it is this aspect of developmental change and personal progress which is also likely to be enhanced and also be perhaps sometimes a significant challenge. Personal progress in terms

of becoming independent is a key concept that has been emphasised within literature surrounding visually impaired young people, for example, Morris et al. 2008; Keil, 2008.

Empirical research has explored differing forms of transition. Evangelou et al. (2008), for example, considered how to effectively prepare primary school pupils for the transition to secondary school, with strategies including “move up days” in which the pupils in year 6 would get to spend a day at the secondary school they would be attending. In addition the secondary school teachers would visit the pupils’ current school. This research relates to Beach’s mediational transition, allowing children to get a feel for what the real experience will be like in the future. Enabling and supporting transition between education and employment through the use of work experience, as mentioned previously, also relates to Beach’s concept of mediational transition. Guile et al. (2001) explore how students learn and develop through work experience. They argue that ‘context’ is an extremely important concept regarding education and work. Education and work consist of two very different contexts. It is also argued that these two contexts will have a different influence on the process of learning.

Developing this theme, Guile et al. (2001) suggest an evolving continuum of approaches to learning through work experience. They become particularly interested in the ‘connective model’ of work experience, which provides a new curriculum framework allowing the basis for development of knowledge, skills and identity. The connective model is based upon the idea of a ‘reflexive’ theory of learning (Guile et al., 2001) that takes into account the influence of context and the organization of work upon the learning and development of students. Guile et al. (2001) highlights the capacity for developing ‘boundary crossing’ skills by, for

example, easing the transition from education to employment by learning strategies and skills in order to cross between contexts and environments effectively. Related to and in addition to this, Guile et al. (2001) highlight the need for learners to conceptualise their experiences in different ways, derived from Freire and Macedo (1999). Freire and Macedo (1999) define the role of the teacher as one who creates 'pedagogical spaces', thereby posing problems to allow learners to analyse their own experience and encourage critical understanding of their experiences. Engstrom (2000) explores supporting students to understand the significance of both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' development of learners. This involves encouraging students to understand workplaces as a series of 'interconnected activity systems'. These interconnected activity systems are built up of a range of 'communities of practice' a term introduced by Lave & Wenger (1991), identifying a group of people who share a common interest or profession.

## **2. Transitions, rupture and identity change**

Viewing transition through a sociocultural framework an individual's move through a period of transition may be perceived as a process of reconstruction, change and adaptation. In this sense, transitions can often be a struggle in terms of re-learning and re-adapting skills and knowledge and adapting these in a new context. There is also the potential for transition in this sense to alter an individual's sense of self, as considered by Beach (1999). It is conceivable that for young people with special educational needs, such as visual impairment, this threat to or alteration of sense of self may be the most difficult aspect to deal with during the transition from education to employment due to a lack of resources or coping strategies (Crudden, 2012).

Research that has considered periods of transition for visually impaired young people suggests that developing and maintaining a positive self-image alongside self-determination are two key components in creating resilience during transition. Wong (2004) found that visually impaired students expressed how they felt they needed to “try that bit harder and prove yourself that bit more to try to get an edge over your competitors” during periods of transition (Wong, 2004, p.41). Wong (2004) notes three key principles that were important factors in considering disabled young people during the post-school transition phase: equality, inclusiveness and autonomy.

Autonomy is perhaps the most significant factor in terms of accounting for the views of visually impaired young people, emphasising a desire for greater independence in adolescence. A potential threat to sense of identity, whilst being involved in transition from education to employment, could create a negative transition. If autonomy and independence has been reached at the latter stages of compulsory education, a new context (employment) could involve rebuilding this autonomy and independence, in addition to re-learning and adapting skills and knowledge.

Evangelou et al. (2008) found that children who claimed to have experienced a ‘successful transition’ from primary school to secondary school made references to changes in their sense of self through improved confidence and self-esteem; the importance of identity within the period of transition is therefore again emphasised in the literature. This sense of identity is likely to build up through primary school and then during what Evangelou et al. (2008) term the “lateral transition” to secondary school. However, the contexts between primary and secondary school remain relatively similar, in comparison to the significantly different contexts found between

school and workplaces. This sense of identity could be lost or at least diminished when moving into a new context and new community of practice.

Zittoun (2006) explored development through transitions and potential uncertainty that can arise from change, characterising this uncertainty as a 'rupture'. Analysing cultural ideas and processes of development within transitions, Zittoun (2006) describes qualitative breaks or ruptures which need to be replaced by an individual's new constructions when experiences can lead to such internal turmoil. Zittoun (2006) identifies three types of possible rupture; change in cultural context, change to a person's 'sphere of experience' and change in relationships or interactions. The transition from education to employment in a sense captures each of these three ruptures. There is a change in cultural context from an educational environment to a working environment. There is a change to the young person's 'sphere of experience' as the individual has not yet experienced employment or work. The transition creates an uncertain experience and a change in the individual's immediate environment. Along with a change in context and sphere of experience, there also exists changes in relationships or interactions with other people in the world of the young person; encountering new people involves a reorientation of identity with regards to how the self is reflected through interactions with others.

Brooks (2007) discusses how friendship has been recognised as an effective means of "reinventing oneself within society in which increasing importance is attached to self-identity and personal choice" (p.702). Friendships built during compulsory education that are perhaps lost during the transition to employment are likely to have a negative effect on the individual and sense of self and identity. Again for students with special educational needs, this effect may be exaggerated due to issues surrounding self-esteem and educational and social inclusion.

### **3. Transitions within Communities of Practice**

Wenger (1998) introduced the concept of Communities of Practice, a third analytical framework that has potential for developing our understanding of transitions. Crafter and Maunder (2012) view this framework as useful in that it places the learner at the centre of the transition process whilst also recognizing the role of communities, practices, meanings and identities in terms of the contexts within which we exist, what we are doing, how we make sense of our actions, our sense of belonging and the effects this has on who we are.

Wenger's (1998) concept of 'Communities of Practice' recognises the significance of social learning theory in that social participation within a 'community' context is considered of prime importance for learning to take place; a developing sense of identity through interacting with members of a shared community and learning shared practices is postulated. The individual is viewed as developing an identity as a competent member of a group, gaining a sense of belonging within an optimum context. Multiple communities of practice can be identified in everyday life to which individuals can belong, related to cultural institutions such as family, school and work. The various communities to which people belong are liable to change over time, for example when beginning work we are no longer a member of the school community, and when we begin work there is a possible reduction in sense of belonging to the family community. Again the concept of transition as a multi-faceted period of change, not just simply a shift from one context to another, is emphasised; a period of constant change, shifts in belonging to different communities and contexts, and constant changes of sense of self and identity is envisaged in this context.

Wenger (1998) illustrates how communities of practice are formed by shared interests, knowledge and common goals. Within school for example, there exist common rituals such as a typical school day and rules. Shared practices also exist surrounding expected behaviour and responsibilities. Teachers are autonomous figures in the school community and students must abide by community norms such as sitting quietly, listening and engaging in lessons. Wenger (1998) emphasises how smaller communities exist within the broad community of practice. It could be argued that pupils with special educational needs have their own sub-community within the school community. Students with special educational needs often interact with teachers who commit to providing extra support, SEN students are likely to build interactions and friendships with other SEN pupils and form a small community of practice of their own notably if the school has a resource base setting or similar.

Within the community of practice framework, transition involves the individual developing new skills and acquiring new knowledge but it also takes in to account the community itself. Transition under this framework is viewed as a two-way process. Crafter and Maunder (2012) identify that within the community of practice framework, Wenger does not address in any depth when individuals do not become competent members of a community, for example, children who disengage from school learning and dis-identify with a community.

Significantly Hodges (1998) comments that “content” of education becomes less important and what becomes of more relevance is the quality of an individual’s participation within the educative or working community with whom they are involved. This quality of participation is essentially what evokes a sense of belonging. Lave and Wenger (1991) have used terms such as ‘marginalisation’ and ‘peripherality’ to imply almost an alienation from the community’s centre for some people and it could

at least be hypothesised that young people with special educational needs and visual impairment may maintain only a marginal or peripheral participation in such contexts. The Communities of Practice framework has been applied to different types of educational transition such as the transition from primary to secondary school and the transition from school to university. However, less attention has been paid to the shift from school or university to employment. This is crucial, however, as these two communities potentially present the two most contrasting contexts and are therefore likely to present the most challenges to the individuals experiencing the process of transition.

### **2.3 Sociocultural Frameworks**

Each of the three sociocultural frameworks discussed offer a different perspective on the transition period but each contain important common themes, which reflect their own interpretation of sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theories offer a broad conceptualization of transition, rather than viewing transition as simply a shift from one context to another, they incorporate the individual's sense of self, identity, learning experiences and the acknowledgement of context and adaptation. Often, discussions surrounding transitions focus on the physical movement between contexts, rather than emphasizing the significance this movement has upon the individual. Sociocultural theory allows us to appreciate the complexity of transition and to understand the experiences and meaning attached to the individual.

In addition, the sociocultural frameworks all establish the importance of relationships. Transition is not carried out by the individual in isolation, but involves social interaction, active participation and building friendships. Social resources are an

important aspect of a positive transition experience and are likely to add a positive affect when young individuals reconstruct their identities in a new context. Zittoun (2006), for example, identifies the link between social and cognitive resources during transition.

Although there is an emphasis on relationships and support networks within sociocultural frameworks exploring transition, there is also a clear recognition of the importance of sense of self during the transition process. The experience of transition can be perceived as a personal project for each young individual, involving reflection and changing or adapting identity. Beach (1999) describes the individual “becoming someone or something new” (p.12) during transition. In this respect sociocultural frameworks point towards the importance of looking beyond the outcomes of transitions, and lead us to understanding and studying the process of transition itself and what it means to each individual. Sociocultural approaches allow us to look at the ‘internal’ processes and shifts that occur within the individual, and with understanding their experiences and the meanings that they attach to these life events. Such an approach has the potential to be very useful in studying young people with special educational needs and visual impairment. It is essential that we understand the thoughts, feelings and sense of self that these young individuals have throughout the transition process in order for us to be able to support this transition in the best way possible and to facilitate interventions within school, employment and the time between these two contexts, that are likely to improve the transition process.

The sociocultural framework identifies that each individual brings their own culture and experience from their existing sociocultural experiences, into new situations and contexts. For example, cognitive resources, styles of learning, skills and knowledge.

This leads to each individual having differing needs, difficulties and support requirements when transition takes place. As mentioned throughout, young people with special educational needs and visual impairment are likely to require additional support to overcome obstacles to transition in this respect. Again here the point is made that a generic 'one size fits all' approach will not adequately address individual requirements. Instead, more personalized and flexible approaches to allow for individual variability are likely to be indicated. If young people in education are given an individualized, rich and flexible transition-education, they are likely to benefit from this experience and therefore bring this positive experience into their new context, whether in further education, training or employment.

Finally in terms of looking at transition from a sociocultural perspective, we should consider the process as equally important to the product or outcome. An individual's experience of transition is critical and of course related to their outcome, if a young person experiences a negative transition, they are likely to suffer a poor outcome. It is important to give individuals the best possible chance of navigating through the transition process successfully. It is also important for the individual to understand transition as a personally constructed process, which shapes their identity in new ways. Young people need to be given sufficient opportunities to experience identity work and adjustment prior to and during their transition. O'Donnell & Tobbell (2007) found that students starting university preferred finding their own way rather than being taught particular skills that they needed. They preferred learning skills and gaining knowledge through their own experiences and mistakes rather than simply being told what to do. This is evidence for young people to be given chances to become actively involved in their own transition experiences. This way, individuals are able to create their own meanings and sense-making of any problems or barriers

they face. Here we see the need for support but not direct teaching. Individuals should receive the necessary support prior to and during their transition but the focus should be on helping the young person to negotiate their own way through the change, almost with a sense of 'self-help', when the support is no longer available, the individual must use their own past experiences and learnt skills to help them overcome challenges. This will eventually lead to a sense of achievement and enhanced independence.

#### **2.4 Transition - Visually Impaired Young People and Implications for the Development of their Independence and Identity**

In the context of this study the Council for Exceptional Children's definition of transition (Halpern, 1994) as the stage of life during which an individual is no longer regarded primarily as a student and takes on the role of a young adult, is helpful. Polat et al. (2001) in their major study for the DfES into the post-16 transition of experiences of young people with SEN, adopt the OECD definition of transition as "a continuous journey that starts well before pupils leave school and does not end when they first enter work"(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1996, p. 42). This definition views the transition process at the age of 16 years as an uninterrupted process in the journey toward adulthood. The period of adolescence in itself is a time of instability and change, the transition from school to further education, employment or unemployment is a crucial process that needs to be met with support and guidance, especially for those with visual impairment. Although many studies have investigated transition services provided for disabled young people, these have typically included all disability groups, leading to a lack of insight and understanding surrounding visual impairment specifically.

### **2.4.1 Employment Outcomes**

Although young people both with and without visual impairment were found by Shaw et al. (2007) to have similar aspirations for their futures, research suggests that for many visually impaired young people employment outcomes are different from those of their sighted peers. Nagle (2001) notes that both the 21st Annual Report to Congress (U.S Department of Education, 1999) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS) demonstrate how disabled young people continue to lag behind those without disabilities on many measures of post-school outcomes including successful transition from educational provision into employment.

Nagle (2001) identified that although visually impaired young people engaged in post school educational provision to a comparable degree to that of young people without impairment, they had a much higher rate of unemployment. This concerning insight is considered in depth by Nagle (2001) who addressed factors that may influence these post-school outcomes for this group of young people, emphasising that whilst in education, visually impaired young people need to be taught job-seeking strategies in order to find part-time jobs, as sighted peers are more likely to secure such opportunities. The involvement of both young people and their families is identified as being crucial in the career planning process and it is highlighted that addressing challenges during the transition process should be a collaborative process involving both the young person and their parents/ carers. In this regard it is viewed as important that parents/ carers understand the capabilities of their children in order to facilitate an optimum transition process, rather than adopting an overprotective strategy in which their children do not learn fundamental independence related skills. Indeed McConnell (1999) argues that parents who tend

to be overprotective, risk their children not learning essential independence skills due to their parents not wanting them to make mistakes. Nagle (2001) advocates that parents and professionals need to work together to foster the independence of visually impaired young people to enhance transition outcomes from compulsory education to employment related activities.

In research conducted in the United States McDonnall and Crudden (2009) examined data from the Longitudinal Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program (LSVRS) and they acknowledged that transition from high school or college to employment can be a complicated and frustrating experience for visually impaired young people and although post-school transition of visually impaired young people into employment has received some attention, there is little empirical research existing to establish which factors affect successful transition into employment for the population in question. McDonnall and Crudden (2009) hypothesized that several variables will be positively associated with enhanced employment prospects for transition age visually impaired young people. These included early work experience, academic competence, self-determination skills, higher levels of self-esteem, their abilities to use assistive technology, involvement in vocational rehabilitation and an internal locus of control. They found that work experience was very important to the employment of visually impaired youths and having held multiple jobs was also predictive of employment. Academic competence in terms of achievement in reading and mathematics had a strong relationship with employment, and the relationship between higher levels of reading and employment was one of the strongest among all of the variables explored. The use of assistive technology specific to the young person's visual impairment was also found to have a strong relationship with enhanced employment prospects. It is important to note that research carried out in

international contexts needs to be considered with care, notably in terms of differing definitions of visual impairment, what constitutes employment and unemployment and the relative ages of participants considered to be within the general cohort of young people or “youths”.

Self-determination or self-advocacy skills and locus of control were found to have a significant relationship with employment (McDonnal and Crudden, 2009) Therefore, it seems that an internal locus of control is positively attributed to employment and consequently an external locus of control may act as a barrier to employment and to the future aspirations of visually impaired youths. Overall McDonnall and Crudden (2009) found that the young people who obtained employment believed they had more control over what happened to them and they were also less likely to feel that powerful others had control over their lives.

McDonnall and Crudden (2009) emphasise that a young person’s attributes relating to feelings of independence, self-determination, self-advocacy and a need to be nurtured in a way that allows them to become independent, self-determined and decisive are all positive indicators of enhanced employability. As noted earlier, parents as well as professionals are a key part of this process and collaboration between professionals and parents could demonstrate the importance of allowing visually impaired young people to make their own decisions in order for them to develop control and independence.

#### **2.4.2 An Expanded Core Curriculum**

Douglas at al. (2014), in considering the views of independence and readiness for employment amongst visually impaired young people in the UK, found that an

overriding concern held by employers persists that visually impaired young people leave school poorly prepared for employment. This research has developed from the five year longitudinal study which this research study is a part of, with its emphasis on how prepared participants feel they are to begin employment and the degree to which their own educational careers and experiences have assisted with this.

Douglas et al. (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 70 visually impaired young people aged 16-19 to enquire how they define independence and how they feel that they would address challenges related to their own employment. How actively or passively the young people felt they should pursue employment- related challenges and how responsibility for such needs should be attributed, whether internally or externally, were two notable themes.

Douglas et al. (2014) note that results support the teaching of disability specific skills at school that has its focus on developing and maximising young people's independence and also providing them with a clear understanding of the accommodations to which they are entitled. This research supports the idea of expanding the "core curriculum" provided in school and colleges and further emphasises how necessary it is for visually impaired children and young people.

An earlier review by Douglas et al. (2009) that looked broadly at visual impairment and the development of independence skills highlighted mobility, low vision and information access and social skills tuition as important constituents of an "additional curriculum", a term often used to denote curriculum areas not usually taught in schools as part of the core curriculum. In the USA "expanded core curriculum" is the term used in similar context. Sapp & Hatlen (2010) identified nine areas that the expanded core curriculum consists of; access or compensatory skills, career

education, independent living skills, orientation and mobility skills, recreational and leisure skills, self-determination skills social interaction skills, use of assistive technology and sensory efficiency skills. It is notable that Sapp & Hatlen (2010) propose that many of the expanded core curriculum skills are able to be subsumed in the general school curriculum, such as working within groups (social interaction skills), for example.

Essentially the concept of the expanded core curriculum is related to developing independence throughout the child/ young person's school and college career, which then elevates their ability to lead independent lives on leaving compulsory education.

Research by Wolffe & Kelly (2011) amongst others reveals that possessing the kind of independence skills outlined by Sapp and Hatlen (2010) is correlated with greater success in securing employment for visually impaired people, with a clear emphasis on positive independence skills also reflected in Wolffe's career education model (Wolffe, 2010). Although positive employment prospects appear to be supported by developing a robust expanded core curriculum, evidence presented by Douglas et al. (2011) and Crudden (2012) suggests that concerns persist that young people leave school or college with insufficient independence skills having been taught or learnt.

### **2.4.3 Independence and Identity**

The views and attitudes of visually impaired young people towards their own independence should be acknowledged. Research findings by Franklin et al. (2001) and Douglas et al. (2010) noted a disinclination on the part of visually impaired young people to be viewed as different by their peer group, leading them to resist using aids or adapted equipment. The reluctance on the part of young people to

participate in some areas of the additional curriculum whilst attending compulsory education can be usefully contrasted with research findings following surveys completed with visually impaired young people who have left compulsory education (Douglas et al., 2009). These latter findings emphasise that those young people who had left compulsory education recommended younger peers give more attention to developing their independence, assertiveness and communication skills and suggested that these would be helpful in seeking employment more effectively. Such findings reinforce the potential value of longitudinal research in highlighting shifting attitudes over time.

In research by Douglas et al. (2014) thematic analysis following semi-structured interviews with 70 visually impaired young people considered their definitions of independence, approaches to address challenges in their lives and consideration of what prepared them (or did not) to be independent. The majority of those young people interviewed viewed independence positively and associated many features of it in the context of being provided with an extended core curriculum outlined by Sapp and Hatlen (2010).

Self-advocacy was considered to be an important attribute that contributed to enhanced independence, linking this to needing to negotiate themselves levels of support linked to their visual impairment. Informal learning such as this was highlighted as important in comparison to more structured and formalised teaching linked to the extended core curriculum and how this might aid preparation for employment. Differing emphases and levels of teaching commitment devoted to supporting and implementing the extended core curriculum by schools were reported by participants, a feature evident in the review of literature presented by Douglas et al. (2014). In this research the responses of the young people to employment-based

scenarios revealed how they would utilise their independence related skills to address challenging situations, with their responses revealing firstly the degree to which they would be active as opposed to passive in addressing a challenge, and secondly how responsibility for the challenge and seeking a solution would be attributed. Psychological theories related to locus of control and attribution theory appear to be of particular relevance to research findings.

Douglas et al. (2014) findings are unequivocal in supporting the further development of an extended core curriculum for visually impaired young people in their compulsory education, with concerns raised through the research findings regarding the commitment that schools in the United Kingdom have to this type of provision and the minimal reference made to such experiences by participants in the research study.

Douglas et al. (2014) note that this research does not illustrate the views of a fully representative sample of young people in the United Kingdom and the questions asked were often hypothetical in nature and related to scenarios that they had not all experienced. Therefore this knowledge and the fact that the responses might not accurately reflect their actual behaviour in employment based settings, means that findings should be treated with caution.

In terms of assistive technology, McDonnall and Crudden (2009) report that it becomes important for young people to determine what technology works best for them and which is the most helpful to them. Opportunities to use a variety of technological equipment are therefore key throughout their educational development and experience in order to help prepare them for employment. With knowledge of which equipment is most helpful and an understanding of how to use it, young

people are more likely to be able to transfer this knowledge and understanding into prospective employment environments.

Every young person goes through the transition phase as they move from compulsory education to deciding on their future. The majority of young people within Hewett et al.'s, (2011) study reported a transition similar to those without a visual impairment, however, there are some examples of specific experiences in which visually impaired young people have struggled or feel improvements can be made. On the whole though findings are positive, but they also provide an indication of barriers faced by visually impaired young people which should be addressed.

Hewett et al. (2011) demonstrated relatively positive findings to date regarding experiences of transition amongst visually impaired young people who are part of the longitudinal study of which this research is a part. The majority of young people within this longitudinal study remained in educational settings. Greater challenges and barriers may therefore present themselves when they move from education settings into employment. Hewett et al. (2011) emphasise that the evidence of problems faced by visually impaired people in terms of gaining employment is overwhelming.

Cavanaugh and Geisen (2012) conducted a systematic review in order to identify and synthesize studies of transition interventions to improve the employability and employment outcomes for visually impaired young people in the United States. They illustrated recent data from the United States Current Population Survey to identify the substantial gap in employment rates between visually impaired young people and sighted peers in the general population. 19.8% of visually impaired young people aged 16-19 were employed, in comparison to 29.2% of young people of the

same age who are sighted. This gap widens in terms of young people aged 20-24, with 39.5% of visually impaired youths employed compared to 63.8% of sighted youths (McDonnall, 2011).

Due to the concern surrounding the low employment rates of visually impaired young people, specialist programmes in the United States have been implemented in order to improve transition outcomes. In addition, researchers and practitioners have implemented interventions to enhance employability skills. Research in the United Kingdom by Douglas et al. (2006 & 2009) and by Keil (2008), for example, identified similarly very poor employment outcomes for visually impaired young people and Cavanaugh and Geisen (2012) argue that although programs and interventions have been put in place, there is yet to have been any systematic reviews that specifically address the transition of visually impaired students. They found several interventions that were designed to improve employability skills including carer awareness and job seeking-skills, independent living skills, parenting involvement, work experience, social skills and self-concept.

Cavanaugh and Geisen (2012) report that the most salient finding from their review was the lack of published studies in the 23-year period of their selection criteria. Only 83 empirical studies existed and less than 20% of these were intervention studies and only 4 were two-group designs, in which only 2 reported significant differences between groups on employability factors. There was a lack of studies providing a basis for establishing a cause and effect relationship. Implications from this study emphasise the need for policy makers, and practitioners to have access to evidence-based practices that can be used to develop public policy and programs of a high quality. The review demonstrates the vital need for scientifically based research to

design, implement and evaluate interventions that directly result in enhanced employment for visually impaired young people.

Hewett et al. (2014) have reported their early findings from the Transitions Project longitudinal study on the post-16 transition experiences of visually impaired young people in England and Wales. As noted earlier, there remains a paucity of research into the post-16 transition experience of visually impaired young people, notably in terms of their experience from compulsory education into further education, higher education, training or employment. Hewett & Douglas (2014) report findings in relation to 47 participants who had recently completed their GCSE studies and left compulsory education out of the 78 young people involved in the longitudinal study which is following the experiences and progress through post-16 transition. All 47 young people were found to have remained in some form of education, and most of them reported enjoying their academic careers to date and expressed positive views of their transition experiences. However, Hewett et al. (2014) reported concerns that many participants had not been involved in formal pre-transition reviews and they had struggled to gain part-time work opportunities.

In considering their findings Hewett et al. (2014) note that the majority of participants in this research considered themselves to have been well supported by their families. As is often found in such research studies, there may be a bias towards young people with high levels of parental support, with this effect reflected in research findings because the transition process is heavily influenced by parental involvement.

Those concerns that were raised related to the perceived relevance of transition reviews and plans, if indeed the young people could recall being involved in their

formulation. Further expressions of concern were raised regarding university tuition fees and how these could influence plans to apply for and attend university courses as a consequence. The lack of opportunities to engage in work experience was also an area of concern, particularly for young people with more severe visual impairment, attributed to them being unable to identify suitable work, or being restricted due to their attendance at a special school or experiencing practical challenge in self organisation and managing their time.

Hewett et al (2014) note that transition from compulsory education is challenging for all young people but that the majority of the group of visually impaired young people being studied as part of this longitudinal research project were optimistic about their own futures. How the young people being followed in this research project respond to the challenges transition from education to employment and training opportunities, will provide important data, particularly as new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) legislation (Children and Families Act 2014) is now in effect in England, resulting in young people previously in receipt of a Statement of Special Educational Needs now having a Education, Health and Care (EHC ) plan and being entitled to specialist support in further education and training contexts (but not in HE settings) up to the age of 25 years.

## **2.5 Young People who are NEET or at Risk of becoming NEET**

In summarising links between young people with a disability and those who are visually Impaired in terms of risk of becoming NEET, it is helpful to note that the number of 16 to 24 year olds 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET; DfES, 2002) in the United Kingdom has remained persistently high over the last

decade and is estimated to have reached over 1 million, with the figure continuing to rise (ONS, 2014). NEET individuals are defined as 'struggling to make the transition from education/ training to employment'. Whilst, for some NEET's this amounts to only transitory interruptions whilst they seek employment opportunities that suit them, for others, being NEET involves prolonged and recurrent periods of unemployment (Gregg, 2001; Macmillan, 2011). Hayward et al. (2008) also considered another category of NEET- 'prospective NEET', as those currently at school but at risk of becoming disengaged and ultimately NEET.

Within the UK there are an estimated 40,000 visually impaired children and young people up to the age of 25 years (ONS, 2012). Only 19.8% of visually impaired individuals aged between 16 and 19 years were employed compared to 29.2% of their sighted peers (Douglas et al., 2009). The figure rises and the gap is more evident in those with visual impairment aged between 18 and 29 years old, with 40% categorised as NEET (Douglas et al., 2009). The Network 1000 project (Douglas et al., 2012) highlighted unemployment as an ongoing problem into adulthood, estimating that only 33% of adults (post 16 years of age) registered as blind or partially sighted were employed. It is evident from these figures that there remains significant gaps in employment rates between visually impaired young people and their sighted peers (Cavenaugh & Geisen, 2012).

Viewed by many as a financial burden on society (Arnold, 2013), tackling the number of NEET young people has remained a central focus of government policy for over a decade (HM Treasury, 2007). Financial resources (for example Educational Maintenance Allowance, 1999), changes to the national curriculum (DfE, 2010; Wolf, 2011) and increasing the age young people are expected to remain in education/training to 18 years (DfE, 2014) have been instigated in an attempt to

lower these figures. However, despite these efforts, the number of NEET's between 16 and 24 years old has remained unchanged (ONS, 2014). This is largely as a result of interventions and policies taking a negative focus on the NEET situation, defining young people as what they are not, rather than recognising their individual differences and needs (Arnold, 2013), and offering personalised support (Yates & Payne, 2007).

Research has acknowledged varying factors which contribute towards an individual being at risk of becoming NEET. Arnold (2013) developed a screening tool that identified eight risk factors of becoming NEET. With the support of existing literature, these risk factors include; accommodation issues (Coles et al., 2002), low motivation & self-esteem (Hayward et al., 2008), behaviour concerns, unemployment in family, poor basic skills, low school attendance (Hayward et al., 2008) and having physical or learning difficulties (Yates & Payne, 2006). In addition to these risk factors, under achievement at school (Furlong & Cartmel, 2004), low levels of support from family (Pemberton, 2008) and low socioeconomic status (Thompson, 2011) also enhance an individual's risk of becoming NEET.

For visually impaired young people several of these risk factors are more evident. According to Harris et al. (2012), visually impaired children and young people are more likely than others without a visual impairment or special educational needs to experience social and economic disadvantage, putting them more at risk of becoming NEET upon leaving school. In addition to this, Chanfreau and Cebulla (2009) noted that at all stages, attainment of visually impaired learners is lower than that of other learners, placing additional strain on visually impaired school leavers to either continue their education or secure employment. However, irrespective of this, Pavey et al. (2009) found that visually impaired young people who had gained good

educational qualifications, reported extreme difficulties in gaining employment. It is therefore suggested that low employment levels within the visually impaired community could be explained by external factors, such as those stated above, and the transition process experienced moving from Secondary School education, to further education or fixed employment.

As noted earlier, transitions, such as that from Secondary School to employment or further education, are a “fundamental feature of social life” (Field, 2010). They are highly complex and cause a lot of uncertainty for individuals (Crafter & Maunder, 2012), typically involving change to self-identity (Lam & Pollard, 2006). The risk factors noted previously can lead to ‘fractured transitions’ from education to further education or employment, with successful transitions reliant upon the required knowledge and ability to negotiate more diverse and complex pathways through education, training and employment (Lawy, 2002). Transitions can be categorised into three frameworks, firstly, “Consequential Transitions” (Beach, 1995) involve the transference and application of knowledge to a new situation. If an individual struggles to reconstruct their old knowledge/skills, and incorporate new ones, the transition process can become almost unattainable. Secondly, “Symbolic Transitions and Identity Rupture” (Zittoun, 2006) involve transitions which lead to a change of the individual’s identity (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Successful transitions include reference to change in an individual’s sense of self through improved confidence and self-esteem (Evangelou et al., 2008). However, changes in relationships or interactions with others can rupture a transition. Engaging in social comparison when adjusting to a new environment, by comparing oneself to others to evaluate whether they fit in (Maunder et al., 2010) can have deleterious and detrimental consequences for the transition process. Finally, the “Communities of Practice Transitions”

(Wenger, 1998) refer to the physical and emotional changes involved in the process of becoming a member of a new community. These transitions will only be successful if the individual acquires the new skills, knowledge and identities of the community (for example, adapting to the unfamiliarity of university language and life).

The uncertainty that can arise from the change process during a transition has been referred to as a rupture (Zittoun, 2006). Ruptures during the transition process can subsequently result in an individual abandoning the transition and becoming NEET. Visually impaired young people are at an increased risk of experiencing uncertainty and disquiet during the transition from education to employment for several reasons.

Visually impaired learners may have failed to receive the appropriate support and individualised education required (Keil, 2012) in their secondary school education, resulting from a generic approach to careers guidance and failure to listen to and consider the needs to individuals (DCSF, 2009). This is hindered further by the lack of tailored planning by teachers which ultimately leads to a disadvantage amongst visually impaired students (Keil et al. 2006). In addition to this, there are considerable variations between local authorities' levels of educational provision for visually impaired learners (Keil, 2012) and deviations in the availability and quality of post-school provision for such learners (Ofsted, 2011). As some visually impaired young people are not adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for the transition process they face post-secondary school, they are at an increasing risk of failing to make sustained transitions and becoming NEET (DCSF, 2009). Hewett et al. (2011) expressed a need for better planning, preparation and information in the transition from school for visually impaired young people, with dedicated transitions workers supporting the young person through the process (Keil, 2011).

Conversely, in a study of employment of visually impaired young people, Shaw et al. (2007) established that several challenges and barriers to employment including; job requirements (e.g. drivers licence), attitudes from employers/ potential employers, restricted resources (e.g. information, equipment) and problems with transportation. These barriers, added to the risk of visually impaired individuals being socially isolated (Wright et al. 2011) can hinder an individual's ability to adapt within a new community and make successful and sustained transitions (DCSF, 2009).

It is evident that additional supportive structures must be put in place to improve the transition process for visually impaired young people and ultimately reduce their risk of becoming NEET.

## **2.6 Policy and Legislative Context**

During the course of this research study the policy and legislative context has changed and this needs to be reflected within this literature review.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice; 0 to 25 years (Department for Education, 2014) outlines statutory guidance that relates to the duties, procedures and policies that apply to children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabled children and young people under the age of 25. The most significant changes from the previous SEND Code of Practice (2001) outlined in the Children and Families Act (2014) are related to the extension of the legislation to protect children and young people between the ages 0 to 25 years, an intention to include the views and increase the participation within the process of children and young people in decision making contexts and, lastly, to focus more on improving outcomes and "transitional arrangements" (DfE, 2014, p.14). The SEND

Code of Practice therefore has clear relevance within the context of this study, looking as it does at post 16 years provision and transition arrangements for visually impaired children and young people.

The process of transition beyond compulsory educational provision is addressed directly by the Code of Practice (2014):

“Local authorities, education providers and their partners should work together to help...young people to realise their ambitions in relation to:

- Higher education and / or employment – this includes exploring different employment options, such as support for becoming self-employed and help from supported employment agencies
- Independent living - this means young people having choice, control and freedom over their lives and the support they have, their accommodation and living arrangements, including supported living
- Participating in society, including having friends and supportive relationships, and participating in, and contributing to, the local community” (DfE, 2014, p.122).

In considering transition into further and higher education settings for young people with SEN, the SEND Code of Practice (2014) views post-16 education as being varied and includes “ school sixth forms (both mainstream and special schools), sixth form colleges, general FE colleges, 16-19 academies, independent specialist colleges and vocational learning and training providers in the private or voluntary sector.” (DfE, 2014, p.112).

## **2.7 Research Aims and Questions**

When considered in combination with this literature review and the terms of reference provided by the Transitions Project as a whole where this phase of the research privileges qualitative approaches in order to gain rich insights into the lived experiences of transition encountered by visually impaired young people, the following research aims and questions were constructed:

**Aim 1:**

To explore the process of transition from compulsory education to other destinations within a group of visually impaired young people who have experienced disrupted and challenging journeys after leaving school.

**Aim 2:**

To illuminate the views of individuals who have experienced transition, consider their own perceptions of the development of their independence and identity as a result of transition and identify enablers and barriers to success in this process.

**Research Question 1:**

How do visually impaired young people view the process of transition from compulsory education into other settings in terms of their feelings of independence and self-identity?

**Research Question 2:**

What do visually impaired young people who have left compulsory education say about factors affecting transition in terms of preparation for their life experiences to

date, particularly with regard to potential education, employment and training pathways following leaving school?

**Research Question 3:**

What do psychological theories relating to transition, identity and independence within a sociocultural framework tell us about how visually impaired young people face challenges presented by post 16 transitions from compulsory education into other settings?

The following chapter Methodology and Research Design will outline the development of the research in terms of addressing the broad research aims and the specific research questions in relation to the substantive and theoretical areas of enquiry outlined above.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this chapter the research philosophy will be defined and therein ontological and epistemological considerations discussed. The choice of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to identify superordinate and sub-themes from data derived from a series of semi-structured interviews with visually impaired young people using a sociocultural framework to explore their transition experiences, feelings of independence and sense of identity will also be discussed.

It will also be important to reconsider the theoretical framework relating to sociocultural theory as it relates to the chosen methodology, methods and research design adopted to address the research questions. In this regard a critical review of the literature relating to IPA will be included outlining how other researchers have approached issues and challenges in similarly focused areas of enquiry.

Five visually impaired young people were chosen using purposive sampling. Each participant had taken part in the Transition Project from its inception. A brief profile of each participant in this research project is provided in section 3.11.2 of this chapter.

### **3.1 Introduction - Research Philosophy**

Educational research in its multiple manifestations exists along a broad continuum, state Cohen et al. (2004). Views range from the traditional objectivist stance to the more recent “subjectivist” standpoint with respect to research in the social sciences. Ultimately the search for what constitutes truth within research has attracted differing notions from different researchers. The importance of the researcher’s guiding philosophy is sometimes unclear yet its importance should not be understated.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) outlined four groups or concepts related to the objectivist – subjectivist continuum of educational research; ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology. These categories relate to analysis of objectivist and subjectivist views of the social world and their respective stances presented as a consequence of the assumptions they identify. It is important to note that although subjectivism and objectivism are identified by Burrell and Morgan (1979) as a way of understanding the social world, all research is unique in its nature leading one to conclude that each assumption needs to be conceived as existing as a continuum and not a dichotomy.

Considering these categories in terms of both their explicit and implicit assumptions about social science, and ultimately truth, is helpful in identifying underlying research philosophy. Understanding the nature of what is real is an ontological assumption. Ontology, the study of being, from a philosophical perspective, views reality as existing independently and separate from consciousness. Alternatively reality is conceived as a product of the mind.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief and its prime concern is what constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge, its sources, structure, and its limitations. Understood more broadly, epistemology is about issues having to do with the creation and dissemination of knowledge, in particular areas of inquiry. Scott and Usher (1999) consider epistemology to be concerned with that which claims to be legitimate knowledge, as opposed to that which is belief or opinion.

Burrell and Morgan's (1979) third category that relates to the objectivist – subjectivist continuum within educational research is human nature. This is best considered in

terms of the assumptions made about the extent to which people's actions are their own responsibility or are due to environmental conditions by which they are influenced, coerced or to which they are subjected.

Cohen et al. (2004) note that the stated assumptions, ontology, epistemology and view of human nature, will influence the final category, that of methodology, in terms of the researcher's aims and chosen methodology. Thus a researcher who wishes to find out more about a person's lived experience would be likely to choose a method such as semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of derived data, whereas a research aim that seeks to identify generalizable laws would employ survey methods or similarly quantitative based approaches.

### **3.2 Ontology and Epistemology – Bases for investigating the person in context**

As noted above, ontology considers the nature of being, the nature of reality and what exists. The essential differences between positivist and interpretivist approaches in research originate in the form of the ontological philosophical positions to which these respective belief systems are allied.

Positivist approaches have generally been viewed as having an objectivist ontological perspective with respect to the nature of reality; reality is considered to be independent of human thought and understanding. Here reality possesses a character that has yet to be discovered by the researcher. The positivist perspective of knowledge and understanding of the world confers upon it the status of being a single reality, a reality that is capable of being scrutinised by the employment of robust scientific methodology with an inherent assumption that the world is governed

by common sense understandings and perceptions and is real and capable of being thus defined.

This research study differs as it has at its origins in constructionism. Therefore, from such an ontological perspective, constructionism views knowledge and truth as never truly accessible or known. As Pring (2004) contends, an objective reality that can be identified and measured does not exist, and reality is seen as an interaction between the objective and the subjective. Within this view knowledge is perceived as a construction of reality from a particular perspective that is grounded in the perceptions of the individual. Therefore guided by this philosophy that which is observed and meanings attached to such phenomena are only capable of being perceived from an individual's own point of view and are not to be labelled as definitive.

These constructionist approaches place capital on the identification of discrete patterns and meanings over universal truths which, Gergen (2001) points out, are co-constructed within interactions in the world, with historical, personal and socio-cultural contexts areas of significance and thus influence.

Epistemology or theory of knowledge is related to ontology and considers how we know what we know. Epistemology is concerned with how we achieve an understanding of our social reality. This research study does not adopt an objectivist epistemological perspective that seeks objectivity characterised by rigour in a scientific quest for relationships with linear cause and effect characteristics. Rather a relativist and interpretive approach is privileged where the meaning of actions and contexts are negotiated in essentially social settings. Thus epistemologically reality is

seen as highly subjective and interpretivist research viewed as promoting an inductive and theory generating approach.

It is worth noting that the drawing of sometimes artificial differences between positivist and constructionist epistemology within academic research is a mistaken philosophy as the ability to employ differing approaches affords flexibility in addressing different research questions. In addition, such flexibility of approach permits a researcher to consider and investigate different aspects of human experience by either epistemological stance according to and as influenced by context. Therefore qualitative research cannot be regarded as a homogenous enterprise as there are a wide variety of methods associated with such a research philosophy because researchers may choose to reach into different research traditions, with differing epistemological views being employed.

In this regard qualitative approaches can be perceived as existing on a wide continuum; from possessing a rigid relativist position to a position where a foundation of realism is privileged (Wilig, 2001).

### **3.3 Qualitative Methodologies and Traditions**

Methodologies that are essentially qualitative in nature have seen their development from phenomenological and social constructionist traditions. These traditions do not view reality as being the fundamental point of concern, preferring to place emphasis on meaning whilst also recognising in Barker's view (2002) that language can assist the researcher to understand the participant's view of their world. However, it is notable that social constructionists often take a more clearly defined relativist approach that places importance on the role of culture and society in the

construction of the self and the manner in which we interact with other people. Clearly this perspective places considerable emphasis on language and social interaction (Gergan and Gergan, 1991), with beliefs about the world essentially social constructions with investigative research striving to make sense of the language people use to describe their experiences. Importantly such language is viewed as pertaining to groups of people as opposed to being an account of a single individual's experiences and feelings.

This view differs from phenomenological approaches that privilege the experiences of individuals to reveal aspects of their own lived experiences with regard to specific events. Thus, a person's thoughts, perceptions and feelings are of particular interest to phenomenologists who are keen to explore the internal worlds of others enabling analysis of the multiple perspectives people possess.

The origins of phenomenological approaches are interesting, developing from a dissatisfaction with traditional modern approaches which advocated a structured belief relating to the world we live in and of the universe. In contrast phenomenologists state allegiance to a view that experience, whilst the product of interpretation and therefore constructed, is nevertheless real to the person experiencing, as it were. Following this view, Finlay (2005) notes that to phenomenologist's truth is seen as an inter-subjective point of view that is inevitably influenced by a social world that is in flux and operating around us.

It should be acknowledged that phenomenological approaches provide a wide range of perspectives, linked by an interest in comprehending the human experience (Smith et al., 2010). The differing aspects of phenomenology relate to approaches that place greater significance on interpretation (hermeneutics) and the study of the

individual (idiographic), as well as approaches that originate from a Husserlian approach that considers detailed, in-depth accounts of experience (Barker et al. 2002).

Smith et al. (2009) note the growth that has occurred in phenomenological research approaches such as grounded theory, ethnography and interpretative phenomenological analysis, and Barker et al. (2002) comments that although each has similarities, distinctions exist in the methods employed to achieve understanding of people's lived experience.

### **3.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The first major use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was in Smith's (1996) paper in *Psychology and Health*. Smith (1996) argued for an approach to psychology that could capture experiential and qualitative aspects of lived experience whilst still being related to mainstream psychology. Although IPA only appeared during the mid-1990s, its concepts and ideas have a much longer history. IPA as a methodology started to become prominent in qualitative psychological research within health psychology. IPA has now been utilised in clinical and counselling psychology, as well as social and educational psychology. Smith et al. (2009) argue that IPA is largely described as applied psychology, or 'psychology in the real world'. However, Smith et al. (2009) go on to describe IPA's core interest group as people concerned with the human predicament and with a focus on people engaging with the world.

Brocki and Wearden (2006, p.88) demonstrate how IPA holds that "human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but they come to interpret and

understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them". Brocki and Wearden (2006) also emphasise the concept of 'self-reflection' within IPA, in which the researcher assumes that participants seek to interpret their experiences in order to understand them.

Larkin et al. (2006) explain that a common misconception of IPA is that it is a 'simply descriptive' methodology. It has been reported by Madill et al. (2005) that IPA has recently been judged as one of the least demanding methods in qualitative psychology. Larkin et al. (2006) highlight how IPA seems attractive to students and researchers due to its accessibility, flexibility and applicability. However, they go on to argue how flexibility can often be mistaken for lack of precision, rigour and accuracy. However, the phenomenological aims of IPA are in fact subtle and complex, which is often overlooked.

Brocki and Wearden (2006) emphasise how IPA has been particularly relevant for health psychology, with the vast majority of published work using IPA being in this field. Health psychologists have recognized the importance of understanding patients' perceptions of and interpretations of their experiences and the meanings they assign to these experiences.

### **3.5 Theoretical Foundations of IPA**

IPA has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience, with a particular interest in what the experience of being a human is *like* (Smith et al. 2009). Smith et al. (2009) argue that for psychologists, a key value of phenomenological

philosophy is the rich source of ideas it provides in terms of examining and comprehending lived experience. As we are usually busily engaged in activities in the world, we often take for granted our experience of the world. Smith et al. (2009) establish that in order to be phenomenological, we need to disengage from the activity and attend to the *experience* itself. Once we stop to self-consciously reflect on our experiences, we are being phenomenological.

Smith et al. (2009), in identifying interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a recently developed and rapidly growing approach to qualitative inquiry, note its focus of examining how people make sense of their major life experiences. IPA is phenomenological due to its concern with exploring 'experience'. IPA researchers assign a particular interest to the way in which the flow of everyday lived experiences takes on particular significance for people, which usually occurs when an important event occurs in our lives. For the majority of time, people are normally immersed within the flow of their experiences, rather than possessing an explicit awareness of it.

### **3.6 Phenomenology**

Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are leading figures in phenomenological philosophy and exploration of their ideas allows us to chart the main developments in phenomenology and to understand which of these developments are most relevant to IPA researchers. These philosophers allow us to appreciate 'experience' as a lived process, which is unique to each person. Philosopher Edmund Husserl's work on phenomenology has helped IPA researchers focus on the process of reflection. Husserl emphasised the attentive and systematic

examination of lived experiences. Husserl (1927) described the method of 'reductions' and 'bracketing' in which people separate their taken-for-granted world in order to concentrate on their perception of the world and their experiences. Each 'reduction' offers a different way of thinking and reasoning about these experiences. Many qualitative researchers have since taken up this approach.

Heidegger, although a student of Husserl, diverged from him and set out the beginnings of the hermeneutic emphasis in phenomenological philosophy. Smith et al. (2009) identify that the key ideas for IPA researchers to take away from Heidegger are that people are 'thrown into' a world of objects, relationships, and language and our being in the world is perspectival, temporal and is in-relation to something. The interpretation of people making sense of their activities is therefore central to phenomenology in psychology.

Merleau-Ponty's (1962) expresses the importance of the body in knowing about the world and emphasises the significance of practical activities and the physical qualities of the body in the world. Merleau-Ponty argues that although we can observe and experience empathy for others, we can never completely share the others' experience as it belongs to their own embodied position in the world. Sartre emphasises that we are caught up in projects in the world. Sartre (1956/1943) argues that we engage with the world through action, meaning-making and self-consciousness. Sartre stresses that we are always becoming ourselves; we are an on-going project. Sartre indicates what a phenomenological analysis of humans can look like; he emphasises the analysis of people engaged in projects in the world and their embodied, interpersonal and affective experiences.

### 3.7 Hermeneutics

IPA's second major theoretical foundation originates from hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. Hermeneutic theorists explore the methods and purposes of interpretation, and question the possibility of uncovering intentions and original meanings of an author. Similar to phenomenology, it is helpful to look at influential hermeneutic theorists in order to gain an understanding of its theoretical use in IPA. Schleiermacher (1998) believed that interpretation involves both grammatical and psychological interpretation; grammatical involving exact and objective meaning of the text and psychological referring to the author's individuality. Schleiermacher offers a holistic view of the interpretative process. Part of the interpretative process expounded by Schleiermacher is understanding the person as well as the text. Schleiermacher (1998, 266) argues that a holistic analysis can offer "an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself". In terms of IPA, Smith et al. (2009) emphasise that researchers are not able to claim that their analyses are more 'true' than the claims of the research participant, however, it allows IPA researchers to see that they can offer meaningful insights, which may exceed the *explicit* claims of the participant. The interpreter of the text has the ability to offer a perspective that the author does not. This 'added value', as Smith et al. (2009) identify it, is likely to be a product of a detailed and systematic analysis of the text itself, but also depends on sharing some ground with the participant being interpreted. Here an inter-subjective dimension to IPA is evident.

Hermeneutics provides a useful way of thinking about IPA methodology. Smith et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of moving back and forth within the process of IPA analysis in order to cover a range of different ways of thinking, rather than a completely linear, step-by-step method. In terms of interpreting text, there are

several different entry levels with regards to its meaning. Although these different levels will be related to each other, they will also offer different perspectives.

### **3.8 Idiography**

In addition to phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA's third major theoretical influence is idiography. This is in contrast with most psychological theory, in which group trends are analysed to establish general laws of human behaviour. Rather idiography is concerned with a unique and particular experience, which is analysed in great detail. Idiography offers a very in-depth analysis, which in turn must be thorough and systematic. Due to this idiography, IPA 'utilizes small, purposively-selected and carefully situated samples and sometimes the use of single-case analyses' (Smith et al. 2009, p.29). Although IPA focuses on the 'particular' it also adopts procedures which move from single cases to more general statements; it does not necessarily produce purely individual findings therefore.

Smith (2004) argues that the value of a detailed case study is twofold. We are able to learn a significant amount about one particular person and their reactions to a specific situation, and there is also the opportunity to see connections between different aspects of the participant's account. Warnock (1987) makes the very important point that a deeper investigation into the particular, also takes us closer to a more universal understanding of a person's lived experience. IPA therefore allows us to be in a better position to think about how we and other individuals may deal with experiences and situations. Smith (2004) adds that the in-depth exploration of individuals also brings us closer to aspects of a shared humanity. Although an individual's experiences and personal circumstances may be entirely separate to our

own, an in-depth analysis could reveal that we actually share a great deal of experience with that person.

After reviewing the three key theoretical underpinnings of IPA - phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography - the aims of IPA become clearer concerning the detailed examination of human lived experience.

### **3.9 Hierarchy of Experience**

IPA is predominantly concerned with comprehensive units of experience, which are those where that experience has a heightened level of significance in the person's life. Comprehensive units are often composed of several different parts of life, although these parts are separated in time; they are linked with a common meaning. In research an interview with a participant would aim to recall the different parts and their connections and discover this common meaning. Smith (2009) characterises this as a hierarchy of experience. For example at the most basic level, we are caught up, unselfconsciously, in our everyday flow of experience. As soon as we become aware of what is happening, or what is happening becomes significant, we begin to have 'an experience' rather than simply 'experience'. IPA aims to engage with a person's reflections on the significance of their own experiences. For example, IPA researchers may be interested in exploring how someone makes sense of a major transition in their life. Smith (2009) describes transitions such as starting work, having a child, losing a loved one. He also establishes that IPA researchers aim to investigate how someone makes an important decision, for example moving to a new country, or committing to an elite sport. Smith (2009) emphasises the variety of these 'experiences'; they can be a result of a person being proactive, yet others can

be unexpected, some discrete and time-bound whereas others are continuous and some are experienced as positive whilst others are negative. What these experiences all have in common, however, is they are of major significance to the individual and will lead to a considerable amount of reflection, thought and feeling.

Endeavour by IPA researchers to make sense of what is happening to people informs us of IPA's interpretative theoretical basis. Smith (2009) identifies that IPA is informed by hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. IPA sees human beings as 'sense-making creatures' (Smith, 2009) and therefore explanations that participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their own experiences. Smith (2009) emphasises that an IPA researcher is engaged in a double hermeneutic in the sense that the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant, trying to make sense of their experiences. The researcher is therefore employing the same skills as the participant, however, the researcher's sense-making is more complex; they only have access to the participant's experience through the participant's own account of it.

IPA is committed to the exploration of a unique, individual case. It aims to identify in detail what the experience for an individual person is like and what sense this individual is making of what happens to them. IPA studies are conducted on relatively small sample sizes. However, the studies are extremely in-depth in their detail. The aim is to find a relatively uniform sample in order to examine similarities and differences in some detail. IPA data collection is usually in the form of semi-structured interviews. There tends to be a flexible interview schedule in which the participant very much determines what is covered. These interviews are subsequently transcribed and are analysed by each individual case via a systematic qualitative analysis. A narrative account is then produced in which the researcher's

analytic interpretation is presented in detail, and in which extracts from the participant accounts are used throughout.

Smith (2004) and Larkin et al. (2006) argue that IPA serves to both 'draw out' or 'disclose' the meaning of experience. This is based on research by Ricoeur (1970) who distinguished between two interpretative positions, a hermeneutics of empathy, and a hermeneutics of suspicion. Hermeneutics of empathy attempts to construct the original experience in its own terms and hermeneutics of suspicion uses theoretical perspectives from outside to shed light on the phenomenon. Smith et al. (2009) argue that IPA researchers in part want to adopt an 'insider's perspective' and understand the participant's point of view. On the other hand IPA researchers also want to stand alongside the participant, in order to look at their experiences from a different angle and to question what they are saying. IPA researchers both represent what the participants would say themselves, but also are constantly interpreting their experiences. IPA is therefore both empathic and questioning; Smith et al. (2009) argue that the word 'understanding' captures this dual role.

In the same sense that Smith et al. (2009) argue for a hierarchy of experience, they also argue for a hierarchy of interpretation. They establish that IPA is always interpretative, but that there are various levels of interpretation. Typically an analysis will become deeper as it progresses. Researcher's interpretation, however, is always grounded by the participant's experience. IPA often initially involves engaging with the main emerging theme. Researchers will then often pick up on the way the participant talks about their experiences and its temporal dimension.

### **3.10 Methodological Orientation**

In addressing the issue of choice of methods for this research study, I have followed a qualitative framework, largely as this reflects the epistemological and theoretical perspective adopted concerning the fundamental nature of what can be known and of knowledge. It is important to acknowledge that such a methodological orientation essentially reflects how EPs have privileged qualitative methods, according to Madill et al. (2002) into the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thereby witnessing an interpretivist move away from more positivist approaches in research (Coolican, 2004). The increased employment of qualitative post-modern approaches within research applied to educational contexts has led to a focus on constructions of phenomena in real world contexts. The use of comprehensive generalisation, of grand narratives to identify the sources and beginnings of knowledge is not acceptable within post-modern thinking; a perspective that there is one system of knowledge that is privileged over another is thereby open to debate and doubt.

Methodologically this research has at its foundation the following philosophical pillars:

- Ontological – Constructionism
- Epistemologically – Interpretivism
- Theoretical Perspectives - Phenomenology Hermeneutics Iterative
- Methodology – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
- Method – Semi-structured interviews

### **3.11 Methodology and Data Collection**

#### **3.11.1 Choice of Method**

Qualitative research aims to focus on meaning, sense-making and communicative action. It explores how people make sense of what happens, and what the meaning behind it is. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that the prime reason for choosing IPA over other qualitative approaches should be because it is consistent with your research questions. They also argue that within IPA, we assume that the data can tell us something about a person's involvement in the world and how they make sense of this. Smith et al. (2009) argue that IPA analysis has different 'flavours' due to researchers directing their attention towards different features of the participant's world but also because different features of the world are brought to the fore by participants.

Smith (2004) establishes that IPA is inductive; IPA researchers are flexible to allow unanticipated topics or themes to emerge during analysis. IPA researchers build broad research questions, which lead to the collection of expansive data, rather than attempting to confirm or negate particular hypotheses. The flexibility of IPA allows unanticipated and engaging material but at the same time IPA is also interrogative. A key aim of IPA is to contribute to psychology by interrogating and revealing existing research. The results of in depth IPA analysis on individual cases do not stand alone; they are then discussed in relation to pertinent psychological research.

One critique of qualitative methods is that they might be perceived as requiring participants who possess reflexive and articulate qualities that are more likely to be found in middle class based socio-economic groups of participants. However, Smith (2004) illustrates that there is no correlation between the socio-economic status of

participant and the richness of the data attained; the richness of the data is more likely to be associated with the importance of the individuals' experiences and their level of engagement.

Semi-structured interviews are often employed in IPA with the aim of facilitating the participant to convey their experience in their own terms. It permits the researcher to establish rapport with the participant and allows flexibility, for example if an interesting area arises, the researcher is able to probe the participant or follow up particular themes. Smith and Osborn (2003) describe semi-structured interviews as the exemplary method for IPA. Researchers have also described participants as the 'primary experts' (Alexander and Clare, 2004, p.82) within the research process; the interview is also a collaborative process. Brockie and Wearden (2006) point out that the majority of research papers express a desire to use an open-ended interview style with IPA in order to facilitate the participant's ability to tell their own story in their own words. It seems that little guidance is given surrounding the extent to which the interviewer should interpret what the participant is saying. Little guidance is also given with regards to how much of the researcher's interpretation should be shared with the participant. Brockie and Wearden (2006) identify that there is a role for interpretation by the IPA researcher in both data generation and data analysis. This implies that the researcher may begin interpreting the participant's personal experience during the interview, as well as interpreting the interview in a more holistic manner after it is complete. However, Smith (2004) expresses concern that there can sometimes be a loss of control within semi-structured interviews and how they can often be personally demanding on the researcher's part.

Smith (2004) illustrates how there is an increasing interest in conducting IPA with different groups. He argues that the guidelines for conducting semi-structured

interviews would need to be adapted when researching other groups. Smith (2004) points out that the typical non-interventionist view of IPA would need to become more interventionist with other groups. Children, adults and people with learning disabilities, for example, may need the researcher to take a stronger role in guiding them through the interview in comparison to IPA interviews more generally. When working with other groups, IPA researchers will need to consider modifying existing protocols when collecting data, suggests Smith (2004).

Considerable interest has been expressed recently regarding whether focus groups can deliver suitable data for IPA. Smith (2004) admits he is cautious or sceptical when asked this due to the central development of IPA being a detailed exploration of personal experience. A semi-structured interview conducted with one individual therefore provides this detailed exploration, however, focus groups tend to explore themes within a group. Smith (2004) remains cautious about the use of focus groups in IPA; the researcher needs to ensure that participants are able to discuss their own personal experiences in sufficient detail and intimacy. This intimacy and detail may be compromised by the presence of the group, especially with regards to personal matters. Group conformity may also occur which may lead to a reduction in diversity of results. Wilkinson (2003) however, suggests that in particular circumstances, it is perhaps possible for a focus group to facilitate personal disclosure even more so than individual interviews.

Smith (2004) actively encourages researchers to consider individual case studies, in order to create an elaborate, intricate and detailed illustration of human experiences. He emphasises how this type of microanalysis will not sit in isolation, but will inform the emerging analysis of the case as a whole. In other words, the presence of intricate detail informs a holistic view of an individual's experience.

Brockie and Wearden (2006) assert that many proponents of IPA argue that studies using qualitative methodology may usefully supplement typical quantitative studies. Here IPA can be viewed not as an isolated alternative to quantitative methods but as complimentary. Johnson et al. (2004) discuss the differences between qualitative and quantitative research by arguing that qualitative approaches which explore meaning and context are beneficial for the exploration of complexity as it makes fewer assumptions prior to beginning research. However, quantitative research is useful in illustrating prevalence or cause and effect.

It becomes clear then that it may be detrimental to use IPA within a pre-existing theoretical framework. Smith and Osborn (2003) state that in IPA research 'there is no attempt to test a pre-determined hypothesis of the researcher; rather the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern' (p.53). IPA has been reported as a particularly strong method for novel research, and therefore using a pre-existing framework may not necessarily be appropriate. Although IPA researchers tend not to formulate hypotheses prior to the interview, this does not mean that researchers do not have an awareness of the current literature relevant to the research questions and the issues surrounding it.

### **3.11.2 Procedure**

#### **Participants**

As noted earlier, five participants were identified to take part in this research through a process of purposive sampling.

Details of the participants are outlined in the table below, with care taken to protect their identities. Each of the participants has experienced challenging transitions after leaving compulsory education.

**Table 1: Participant “Pen Picture” Summaries**

Name	
Participant 1 (P1) Male	<p>Age: 19 at interview            Preferred print size/ format: 24            Registration: Blind            Transition Project Cohort: When in Year 11            Brief background: He completed A-levels and got a place at university. Went there for one term and then decided he didn't like the course, so dropped out. Said originally that he wanted to go back and study another course at university, but didn't apply, and hasn't really had a clear plan of what he wants to do since leaving university over a year ago            Living in the West Midlands, England with his parents</p>
Participant 2 (P2) Female	<p>Age: 20 at interview            Preferred print size/ format: 16            Cohort: Year 11            Registration: Partially sighted            Brief background: She is now in her fourth year of doing A-levels and has just applied to go to university. Had a difficult time at school and felt that she wasn't being supported. Now moved to a college and got through first year of A-levels, so after third attempt, moved onto A2s. Really desperate to get to university and to get onto a degree course.            Living in South Wales with her parents</p>
Participant 3 (P3) Male	<p>Age: 19 at interview            Preferred print size/ format: 18            Cohort: Year 11            Registration: Partially sighted            Brief background: He completed GCSEs and then moved onto various Level 3 type courses. First of all he started on an engineering course which would lead to an apprenticeship, but then decided he didn't enjoy that. Moved onto a media course, and dropped out of that after concluding he had got everything out of it that he wanted. Decided to look for work, but couldn't find anything, so is now back in college again studying for a personal trainer course (first year of two).            Living in South Wales with his parents</p>

Participant 4 (P4) Male	<p>Age: 18 at interview  Preferred format: Braille  Registration: Blind  Cohort: Year 9  Brief background: He was at residential specialist school for students with visual impairment, but now moved to a residential specialist further education college for students with visual impairment. Struggled with courses after GCSE and moved to specialist college to take more vocational type courses. Didn't have a clear mind of what he wanted to study once he got to FE college.  Living in England at a specialist residential further education college</p>
Participant 5 (P5) Female	<p>Age: 20 at interview  Preferred format: 48/72/Electronic  Registration: Blind  Cohort: Year 11  Brief background: She was at specialist residential school for children with visual impairment, but then moved to a mainstream college where she got a level 2 qualification, before moving onto level 3, and then having to drop out because she couldn't access the course. Really wants to work with people with disabilities, and was really encouraged to get a job at a blind charity in a large city in England. However, this was on a zero hour contract, and they have only offered her work on one occasion. She is also volunteering for them. Her eyesight has deteriorated recently, and she seems to be struggling with that, especially as she knows that it is likely to deteriorate further.  Living in England with her parents</p>

## Data Collection

As proposed by Smith et al. (2009)

“IPA is best suited to a data collection approach which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences.” (p.56)

This led to the use of individual semi-structured in-depth interviews as this approach was viewed as providing a certain structure to interviews that enabled matters to be considered and discussed, as well as enabling the interview itself to progress and

grow in directions that may be unexpected and to lead participants to feel supported in enlarging upon their initial thoughts and responses.

Within a research context that can be characterised by intricate and dense detail, where a straightforward, perhaps common sense account of a person's deliberations or reflections is beyond reach, establishing an atmosphere that aims for a familiar lack of formality is beneficial.

Each of the interviews lasted between one and a half hours and two and a half hours, a period of time viewed by Smith et al. (2009) as apposite for a detailed and detailed interview.

A total of 16 open-ended questions that were related to the research questions under investigation were generated, with associated prompt questions formulated to stimulate discussion should they be required.

In the design and development of the interview schedule I aimed to begin to organise and marshal thoughts and ideas, as well as formulate a flowing agenda or structure that set out to lead the interview as felt to be necessary. At the same time it was permissible if the individual interviews developed quite spontaneously to allow this to happen, militating against the imposition of an ordered set of questions, as noted by Smith et al. (2009).

Interview questions were developed that were open-ended in nature, designed to elicit in-depth and considered replies and that were likely to allow the interview to develop in a more natural or true to life way, thereby as suggested by Coolican (2004) leading to "richer, more genuine and realistic information on the interviewee's terms" (p.155). Participants gave their consent to the interviews being recorded that

enabled a precise verbatim account of the interview to be transcribed and subsequently analysed. Alongside an exact account of the interviews being produced, I also made handwritten notes during the interview of any non-verbal behaviours or issues to refer to later in the interview.

The interview questions that were developed and formed the interview schedule were formulated to tackle the research questions. The interview schedule was so designed in order to take account of Smith et al.'s. (2010) suggestions that such interviews commence with a question that encourages the interviewee to talk at some length and therefore participants were asked about their respective transition related experiences from when they entered primary school and questioning then followed their individual chronologies to the present day as this would be likely to be a principally descriptive account.

Before embarking on the interviews I assured myself that I was content that the interview schedule had been appropriately assembled in order to convince participants that I was not operating with a predetermined view of how the interview process would proceed, which could act to affect the depth, richness and duration of their responses. This perspective also fitted with my view that semi-structured interviews should be essentially flowing and evolving processes that call for sensitive management.

### **Pilot Interview**

As noted earlier, a pilot interview was employed to assess the choice of data collection method for the research study. I interviewed a young person of similar age to the purposive sample of participants who had recently left compulsory education and who is attending university. The young person that was used in the pilot study

was not visually impaired. The pilot interview enabled me to trial research questions and to rehearse interview technique within an IPA structure. The effectiveness of the pilot study was evident in that it permitted questions to be assessed and ordered according to the responses and reactions of the young person interviewed during the pilot study. I was able to discuss the features of the pilot interview with the participant, ask questions relating to the experiences that the participant felt were positive or otherwise and thereby to discover modifications and amendments considered to be needed.

Following the pilot study interview, the feedback provided as part of this process and my own post hoc reflections on the interview process, the adopted interview approach was considered compliant with IPA methodology. In addition the questions that had been generated were considered to be appropriate in terms of prompting discussions during the planned interviews and no changes were implemented.

After each individual interview was completed I set aside time to reflect on the procedure that had transpired primarily to try to establish and maintain consistency and overall appropriateness of questions and overall approach.

Data derived from the pilot study was not contained within the final research report.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews and IPA**

The development of affinity and confidence with participants in research is important and within an IPA structure or framework particularly so. Indeed, Smith et al. (2009) view the development of rapport and trust as pivotal to the accomplishment of a feasible and worthwhile piece of research and to the quality of the data; interviewees are indispensable in being active participants in the research. Cohen (2007)

comments that part of the process of developing good empathy with interviewees relates to outlining from the onset clearly definable objectives and boundaries, while at the same time maintaining sensitivity and empathy to verbal and non-verbal behaviours projected by participants. This includes the need for the interviewer to remain vigilant to the possibility of participants' experiencing discomfort or distress and the research process must always be viewed from the perspective of those participating. With this principle in mind I stated to interviewees that all answers to questions were valid, that there were no right or wrong answers and that, as noted by Smith et al. (2009) the interview should be a dynamic, active process between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Smith et al. (2009) comment on the role of the interviewer in the context of IPA method, suggesting that participants are provided with time to develop and build up their responses as they wish and to this end I remained involved in the process as an active and inquiring listener.

It is also important to note that I was aware of my role as an educational psychologist throughout the interview process and the effect that this may have had on the views and perceptions of participants. The possibility that this dynamic could lead to the creation of overt or covert power differentials between me and the participants during interviews was considered carefully, particularly in light of guidance from the BPS (2009) that relates specifically to ethical practice in research and that could be of relevance to this context. In order to address these concerns I aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere in which the interviews occurred and through limited self-disclosure and humour tried to create a feeling of joint endeavour and trust.

Ethical challenges that needed to be addressed during this research are addressed in more detail in section 3.11.4.

### **3.11.3 Data Analysis**

Smith et al. (1999) provide a detailed account of data analysis and the analytical process in IPA and in so doing emphasise the close relationship between analyst and text. The analyst seeks to understand the participant's account, whilst simultaneously making use of their own 'interpretative resources' (Smith et al., 1999, p.223). Smith (2004) went on to argue that the quality of the final analysis is determined by 'the personal analytic work done at each stage of the procedure' (p.40). Smith (2004) notes that analysis guidelines for IPA are intended for adaptation and development. IPA data analysis takes many different forms and in this regard Smith et al. (1999) explicitly state that it is not suitable to provide a prescriptive methodology for IPA that everyone should abide by. Although there is a basic process underlying IPA, there is no detailed formula or procedure. The initial process often involves concentrating on themes and connections available, with Smith and Osborn (2003) describing semi-structured interviews as the exemplary method for IPA. Researchers have also described participants as the 'primary experts' (Alexander and Clare, 2004, p.82) within the research process and thus the interview is also a collaborative process. Brockie and Wearden (2006) point out that all research papers express a desire to use an open-ended interview style with IPA in order to facilitate the participant's ability to tell their own story in their own words. Brockie and Wearden (2006) identify that there is a role for interpretation by the IPA researcher in both data generation and data analysis. This implies that the researcher may begin interpreting the participant's personal experience during the

interview, as well as interpreting the interview in a more holistic manner after it is complete.

Smith et al. (1999) identify that care should be taken in order to minimise researcher bias in the process of theme selection for analysis. Care also needs to be taken to distinguish between the participant's original account and the analyst's interpretations. Brocki and Wearden (2006) identify that in all but one of the papers they reviewed, verbatim extracts from transcripts were used, which allows the reader to make their own assessment of the analyst's interpretation. Extracts are often used to demonstrate a theme within the participant's account.

Within the scope of this research study it is also important to further explore and offer a critique of IPA. Smith (2004) and Larkin et al. (2006) promote IPA as a research methodology oriented towards the exploration and understanding of the experience of a particular phenomenon that leads to a fine grained analysis that can be used to contextualise existing qualitative research. Pringle et al. (2011) discuss and critique IPA in relation to other phenomenological approaches, with possible limitations and benefits explored, with the concluding view that IPA studies can influence and contribute to theory, with an overriding emphasis on the importance of professionals understanding the meanings of what participants say in qualitative research. In an important critique of phenomenological research methods in general terms Findlay (2009) admits that the diversity of research approaches employed by phenomenologists is reflected in the range of philosophical ideas applied to empirical work and that this in itself "provokes both uncertainty and controversy" (p.6). In attempting to clarify the contentions that exist when offering a critique of phenomenological inquiry in general and IPA in particular Mills' (2005) contention is of relevance stating that it is important for any discipline to "evaluate its theoretical

and methodological propositions from within its own evolving framework rather than insulate itself from criticism due to threat or cherished group loyalties” (p.150).

I used a stage by stage analytical process adapted from Smith et al. (2010, p.82) in order to analyse the data derived from semi-structured interviews. This is detailed in Chapter 4 section 4.1. I also chose to take advantage of an opportunity to informally involve a peer researcher in the analysis of one data set in order to engage in a process of triangulation to control for inherent bias within the research and to confirm valid themes, issues of concern raised by Golafshani (2003). The peer researcher was an educational psychologist colleague who volunteered to assist me for a time limited period with the analysis of this first data set. The peer researcher was not able to access any confidential data relating to the participants and her involvement was minimal in this regard. In addition the peer researcher assisted in the seeking and identifying of emergent themes, sub-themes and superordinate themes involving the first transcribed interview from the data set as a whole. During the period of the peer researcher’s involvement we were able to informally discuss and compare our respective identified emergent themes, sub-themes and superordinate themes from the first transcribed interview data set and we achieved similar outcomes in this task. I found the process of working alongside a peer researcher in this manner, although brief, nevertheless helpful in considering and reflecting upon issues relating to the overall data analysis task. It is important to recognise and acknowledge that criticism can be levelled at such a process if it claims to enhance reliability and validity due to the inductive nature of the research approach, alongside the level of absorption or immersion with the text that I as the researcher experienced using the stage by stage analytical process adapted from Smith et al. (2010). Lack of available

resources meant that I was unable to involve a peer researcher to analyse all data sets.

#### **3.11.4 The Proposed Research - Ethical challenges**

The British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2010) and the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011) were important sources of guidance during consideration of ethical challenges likely to be of relevance when formulating this research proposal.

It is important to note that the Longitudinal Project has the approval of the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee, including the process of recruiting participants and for the interview schedules (Appendix 1) used with participants. Written informed consent from all participants and parents and carers of participants (where necessary) of the longitudinal project has been secured by the project team of which I have been a part. Relevant information sheets sent to potential participants outlining the purposes of this particular research and participant consent forms are placed in the appendices of this thesis (see Appendices 2, 3 and 4).

The specific ethical considerations and my responses to these are detailed below:

##### **Participants – their recruitment**

The longitudinal project recruited two cohorts of visually impaired young people in 2009 from school years 11 and Year 9. From the outset the young people and their parents and carers were informed of the rationale and nature of the research and the

methodologies that were to be employed; interviews and questionnaires. In phase 2 of the project, the current phase, case study methodology will also be used.

In terms of recruitment of participants for this research I intended, with colleagues in the project team, to identify young people who have experienced some challenge during the transition period after leaving school, including difficulty completing courses of study within expected timeframes, difficulty engaging in education, employment and training and periods of being NEET. This approach of purposive sampling was necessary for me to adopt in order to gain insight into the needs of young people with visual impairment experiencing some degree of disrupted transition from compulsory education into employment. This aligns with the overall research aims of the longitudinal project to better understand and challenge the very low employment rates amongst visually impaired young people.

All of the young people taking part in the research project were initially recruited either through local authority visual impairment support services or special schools within the Midlands of England and Wales via an anonymised list of all young people available who could potentially take part in the project. This also enabled the research team to compare some broad characteristics of the recruited sample in terms of ethnicity, gender and required reading format, for example. Services distributed information to the sampling frame, or potential participants, about the project. The project did not recruit visually impaired young people who had additional learning difficulties.

Prior to interviews I proposed to access a brief chronology or “timeline” of the participants’ educational careers from attending secondary school, leaving compulsory education to their present educational, training and employment-based

contexts (Table 1 Section 3.11.2). This information will provide opportunities to rapport-build with interviewees, to support their level of engagement, to individualise some questions and also to try to avoid any uncomfortable or insensitive questions implying any sense of failure on the part of participants by asking ill-informed questions regarding decisions they may have made during their recent educational and employment histories. As an interviewer I was particularly mindful of the importance throughout the interview process of demonstrating appropriate levels of empathy towards participants.

Purposive sampling used in this research involves choosing a non-representative subset of a larger population and is constructed to serve a specific research need or purpose. As noted in the Introduction chapter, the participants who were interviewed are visually impaired young people participating in the Transitions Project and who have been noted to have experienced some degree of challenge or uncertainty in their transitions from compulsory education and beyond into either Sixth Form College, Further Education College, training or unemployment.

Smith et al. (2009) note that purposive sampling in IPA is common in order to find a more closely defined and homogeneous sample for whom the research questions will be significant.

## **Consent**

Each participant gave verbal and written consent at the beginning of this research study that is being conducted. In addition, on-going consent will be sought verbally to continue the research during any subsequent stages of the research process.

Before the interviews began participants were briefed in terms of the expectations of the interview and they were also provided with a briefing summary of the research aims (Appendix 2 Transitions Project - Information and Appendix 3 Transitions Project - Focussed Study). These had been discussed when the dates for interviews were initially arranged as a stage of securing participant consent but were reiterated before the interview began.

After individual interviews were completed each young person who participated was thanked verbally and via a gift voucher sent by the Research Team.

### **Right to withdraw**

Participants were made aware of their ability and right to withdraw from the research project at any time and at any point during the research project without explanation. This could be signalled verbally or in writing and will be fully respected up until the conclusion of participant interviews.

As stated by the BPS (2009), it is essential that research participants' sense of self-determination is promoted. In addition any attempts to pressurise participants to maintain involvement in research must be resisted. In this research project I made it clear that participants had a clear right to withdraw within the consent letter (Appendix 4) and prior to the beginning of each meeting a verbal reminder was given to participants.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

I sought to maintain the confidentiality of participants through adopting additional measures including holding interviews in quiet rooms within the homes of participants, with their prior permission duly sought. On two occasions participants

requested that family members remain in the same room for the initial part of their interviews, which I agreed to as this request appeared to be related to putting participants at ease for the initial questions of the interview process.

Individual participants will remain anonymous and their identities will not be revealed throughout this research. Interview transcripts were anonymised using numerical codes to insure individual participants' identities and any third parties mentioned in interview transcripts will remain confidential.

It was important, however, to make it clear to participants that I had a duty of care with regard to the safeguarding of young people and any potential illegal behaviour. If any such concerns occurred during the research I would inform participants that for such reasons anonymity and confidentiality will not be maintained and appropriate agencies will be contacted.

### **Data storage and handling**

The data collected from the interviews was gathered using a digital audio recorder following the granting of permission by participants. Supplementary notes taken during the interview process were carefully stored following guidelines laid down by the Data Protection Act (1998).

All research data will be stored in a secure and locked filing cabinet at the University of Birmingham. Data held electronically on a computer will be password protected and paper copies of data will be secured as noted above. All recorded digital taped interviews will be destroyed at the conclusion of the examination of this research.

### **Subterfuge and non-disclosure**

There will be no subterfuge or non-disclosure of relevant and important information relating to participants during this research process.

### **Risks of distress/ safety of participants**

After each individual interview was completed I carried out a de-brief meeting with the participants enabling them to reflect on the interview they had experienced and provided an opportunity to withdraw any aspect of their contribution that they felt was likely to engender feelings of distress or concern. Smith et al. (2009) note that this process compliments the IPA method well.

The potential risks of psychological distress being caused by engaging in this research process were discussed with participants prior to interviews occurring. Measures to address any psychological distress and to reduce the risk of this occurring were robust and included the option of terminating interviews if a participant appeared upset. In such instances I would encourage the interviewee to seek appropriate support and debriefing will include reference to avenues of professional counselling relating to the issues that have led to distress. Interviews will not force participants to discuss aspects of their lives they do not wish to disclose.

In line with BPS (2009) guidelines participants were provided with my contact details enabling them to discuss the process at any stage if they wanted to, and also if they experienced stress, potential harm, or related questions or concerns that may have arisen during the interview process despite the precautions that I implemented.

Should participants during interviews disclose information clearly suggesting psychological or physical harm I will refer that person to appropriate professional advice and support.

Participants who are known to be in receipt of professional advice and support due to psychologically derived distress and/ or vulnerability were not recruited to take part in this research.

I will seek support from my academic supervisors should I experience distress as a result of participants themselves becoming distressed.

### **Timeline of research**

- Participation in longitudinal research project – achieved since 2010
- Ethical approval for the Transitions Project as a whole – achieved 2010 and additional ethical amendment forms were submitted to the University of Birmingham's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Ethical Review Committee when a new piece of related research, such as the proposed interviews outlined in this thesis, was proposed.
- Data Collection – February to March 2014
- Analysis of data and written thesis – March 2014 to April 2015.

### **Reporting of research findings**

Research findings will be reported in a written thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham. Findings will also be reported to the longitudinal project steering group and will contribute to the projects overall findings through publication in academic and professional journals. Dissemination of research findings will occur within my own educational psychology service and at designated training events.

In the following chapter the research findings will be presented following implementation of the research design outlined in this chapter to address the research questions. As well as considering findings, a discussion will be presented that will consider research findings in light of the literature outlined in Chapter 2.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Introduction – How Data Analysis Revealed Superordinate and Sub-Themes**

This Findings and Discussion chapter highlights and considers the perceptions of young people that emerged from the interview process. An overview of the themes identified is initially presented which provides a framework for an in-depth detailed discussion of the themes that arise.

The process by which the themes were identified was based on their prevalence and predominance within the interview transcripts. In addition individual accounts that revealed a unique or in-depth perspective were analysed. Each sub-theme is presented separately in this Findings and Discussion chapter. However, it is important to note that they occurred within the context of the broader account and that only this broader account is able to reflect the complexity and intricacy of the data and the relationship and essential connectedness that exists between each theme. Each superordinate theme and their inter-related sub-themes will now be considered and discussed in turn.

A discussion of the findings will be combined with related discussion that relates to the substantive theoretical and methodological issues, linking key findings with the research questions and the literature reviewed earlier.

A stage by stage analytical process was adapted from Smith et al. (2010, p.82) in order to analyse the data derived from semi-structured interviews (Appendix 5 – Semi-structured interview schedule) for an example taken from an interview with Participant 1).

### **Stage 1 – Transcription**

A verbatim transcription was completed of the audio recording of each interview (Appendix 6).

### **Stage 2 – Reading and repeated re-reading**

This stage involved me becoming fully immersed in the data. In so doing the more richly detailed sections and those where there appeared to surface differences in nuance and specifics were sought and considered most carefully.

### **Stage 3 – Initial Noting**

Identifying the semantic content and language used comprises the initial noting stage which emphasises detail in producing a commentary that lacks structure but outlines what has happened and matters to participants, alongside their meanings. Attention during this stage is paid to linguistic (the use of language by participants), descriptive (content of what is said) and conceptual (interpretative and interrogative) comments. During this third stage I was concerned with noting text that I viewed as of significance and possibly indicative of free associations.

### **Stage 4 – Developing Emergent Themes**

From initial noting (previous stage) my task was to attempt to identify the complexity of that said whilst reducing the data volume. This was achieved by noting interrelationships and patterns, leading to chunking themes from more disparate transcriptions. This stage relied on the researcher to be data grounded whilst at the same time acknowledging the conceptual.

## **Stage 5 – Seeking and Identifying Connections Across Emergent Themes**

Themes are analysed in terms of their similarities, ease or otherwise of fit when engaged in mapping exercises. Their relation to research questions is also an important aspect of this stage that is dominated by seeking connections across a number of merging themes. I took less note at this stage of the order in which themes appeared in text and grouped them. Connections were established through several processes; superordinate themes were developed by *abstraction*, *subsumption* led those emergent themes to become superordinate, *polarisation* helped identify themes oppositional to each other, *contextualisation* saw themes being related to life experiences, *numeration* identified the frequency of which a theme was discussed and *function* assisted me in deciding what function are the assisting the participant.

From this process a representation of themes could be developed.

## **Stage 6 – Moving to the next Participant/Transcription**

From this point I went on to analyse the next transcription and in so doing tried to bracket (set aside) knowledge and assumptions derived from the previous text.

## **Stage 7 – Seeking Patterns Across Participants**

Connections between and across transcribed interviews are sought, as well as considering consistent themes, shared and individual meanings derived from previous stages. The analysis should be characterised by a strong interpretive focus.

The transcript analysis of my interview with Participant 1 (P1) in Appendix 6 (transcribed Interview of P1) illustrates the process outlines above that is closely linked to the analysis process based on a model designed by Smith et al. (2009).

## 4.2 Superordinate and Sub-Themes

In-depth analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken and a total of three significant and over-arching superordinate themes were identified relating to the process of transition from compulsory education to further education training and employment, as well as related sub-themes.

These broad themes and their inter-related sub-themes are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Superordinate themes identified with their related sub-themes**

Theme	Sub-Theme
1. Spectrum of reported experience ranging between dependence and independence	1a Levels of support and the nature of that support in educational and training contexts  1b Resilience  1c Problem solving  1d Orientation, mobility and other independent living skills
2. Personal and study-based challenges and responses to these	2a Self-advocacy  2b Assertiveness  2c Solution focussed approaches  2d Taking responsibility
3. The availability and influence of support systems	3a Family involvement and guidance in decision making  3b Peer group influence  3c Presence of specialist advice regarding study and career choice  3d Guidance and mentoring

Where direct quotations are taken from transcribed interviews (in italics) all references to people's names and means of identifying participants by revealing the names of educational, training or employer-based institutions have been removed.

### **4.3 Presentation of three superordinate themes**

#### **1 Superordinate Theme: Spectrum of reported experience ranging between dependence and independence**

A significant theme to emerge from the interviews concerned the way in which the participants tried to make sense of the degree to which they felt either dependent or independent of professionals, family and friends during the process of transition and how they psychologically conceptualised their experiences. This broad superordinate theme was identified as it emerged across each of the data sets, although each participant approached the issue from differing perspectives, something which is reflected in the related sub-themes of levels of support and the nature of that support in educational and training contexts, resilience, problem solving and orientation, mobility and other independent living skills.

##### **1a Sub-Theme: Levels of support and the nature of that support in educational and training contexts**

The sub-theme of levels of support and the nature of that support in educational and training contexts emerged in the transcripts of all five participants (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5). A variable nature of support in secondary school was reported by participants when discussing their experience in secondary school, 6th Form College and FE College.

Wenger (1998) argued that pupils with special educational needs will often interact with specialist teachers who commit to providing extra support to them more so than their peers, although this is not necessarily reflected in the data sets. In addition, Birch and Ladd (1997) highlighted the significant importance of the teacher-child relationship in a pupil's transition through school. The participants varied experiences in terms of the levels of support and the nature of that support in secondary school contexts emerged in their use of language that reflects their satisfaction in some cases and their frustration in others.

Previous research has signified becoming independent as a key factor in a student's personal progress, more explicitly amongst visually impaired young people (Morris et al., 2008; Keil, 2008). Wong (2004) contended a desire for greater independence in adolescence is of considerable importance to visually impaired young people, with any potential threats to their independence during their transition from education to employment potentially having detrimental consequences on the overall transition process. However, the transition process for visually impaired young people is likely to be more challenging due to their additional needs, in terms of specialist equipment and transportation, which could ultimately hamper their independence and choices they make during their transitions.

This is evident during discussions with P1, regarding the FE College choice's made.

Participant 1 (P1) Lines 47-49 from Transcription of individual interview (see Appendix 6)

*P1 47-49 So, but and a positive with \*\*\*\*\* College was that I could have transport; I could keep the taxi's but I wouldn't have been able to have it \*\*\*\*\* College (further away) because it was too far. So that was another reason why I chose \*\*\*\*\*.*

This suggests that provision in the local authority may have encouraged P1 not to travel independently to his preferred FE College option but to depend instead on a taxi and go to a more local provision (this also has links with the sub-theme under this superordinate theme, of Orientation and Mobility/ Independent Living Skills – sub-theme 1d).

In considering transition to university, P1 reflects on how he might have been more thorough in researching the levels and nature of support available to him at university prior to him attending for a brief, unsuccessful period:

*P1 229– 23) Again, it was like because my friends (to support me) were there it was very reassuring, so I didn't really have that many worries, but I guess it is important to look at what support there is going into it (prior to attending university).*

In contrast P2 was generally critical of the levels and nature of the support she received:

*P2...28-29 (I received) very little. I received enlarged items and that was it. That was all I received...apart from my exams where I had my extra time.*

P2's experience of transition from secondary school to 6<sup>th</sup> form may have some similarities to that of some other visually impaired young people who report failing to receive the level of individualised support they feel that they need (Keil, 2012), resulting from a generic approach to careers guidance and failure to listen to and consider the needs to individuals (DCSF, 2009). This is hindered further by the lack of tailored planning by teachers which ultimately leads to a disadvantage amongst visually impaired students (Keil et al., 2006).

In her interview P2 reflects on her experiences of being a young carer and notes that in her view she has had to support herself rather than rely on support from educational contexts and in doing so identifies some protective factors:

*P2 821-825 and in many ways it's set me in good stead, because a lot of people are like 'oh my god, oh my god, I'm going to university I can't cook, I can't cook, I don't know how to clean, I don't know how to use a washing machine – help!' And I already know all that! I've got no worries, no concerns, I can already do it all (due to status as a young carer).*

These views have clear links to sub-theme 1d - independent living skills development.

P3 reflects positive views about his support at key transition points during his school career and he acknowledges the individualised nature of the support he received prior to his transition to FE College:

*P3 112 – 115 Yeah it was done in advance (study materials being adapted). And by that time I think most of the helpers (in school) knew me so if they weren't sure about it they wouldn't enlarge it because as I said I didn't like stuff pre-enlarged for me and stuff unless I know, right, I can't see it ok.*

P3's account suggests that he has been very assertive (sub-theme 2b) in indicating the levels and nature of support he has been willing to accept before, during and following his transition from compulsory education into various training pathways. McDonnall and Crudden (2009) report the importance for visually impaired young people to determine what technology and learning techniques work best for themselves and which is most helpful to them, in order to prepare them for employment. This seems to have been absent in P3's responses.

P4 was asked why he chose to move to a specialist residential further education college:

*P4 225-227 Because I found that they had very good support and it, like they were going to give me more independence as well, even though I've got independence, but to make sure that I had more independence and to make sure I'm on the track that I want to be.*

P4 went on to discuss work experience opportunities he had been provided with:

*P4 276-282 I had a bit of work experience, I organised some work experience at home....It was with the radio called Insight which is hosted by the RNIB, and I went to the station in \*\*\*\* (city) and I had a bit of a work experience week with them one week as well. That was quite interesting. Yeah they, they're quite good with sighted guides and all of that.*

Guile and Griffiths (2001) suggest that visually impaired young people learn and develop in work experience placements, thus aiding the successful transitions between education and employment.

Remaining on the sub- theme of levels and type of support P5 expressed views about transition-based destinations and her concerns about the levels and nature of support that she received. The sub-themes of self-advocacy (2a) and assertiveness (2b) are perhaps reflected a little in elements of this interview excerpt.

*P5 184-192 (discussing choice of further education college after specialist secondary school for children with visual impairment) Well, I didn't really choose it, my mom and dad did, because I just didn't know what to do....they (college staff) said to me "you'll get the support you need, we'll enlarge the stuff for you" and then it gets to the exam and it's "what do you need \*\*\*\*\*?" I need it enlarged at least, I get to the point it's not done. I need 100% extra time, I get 25.*

Implications for P5's social and emotional development are evident in the way she feels that she was supported:

*P5 259-260 It just, I just felt a bit alone because I didn't have no friends. I felt a bit of an outcast 'cause I had a white cane and an LSA with me.*

P5 (discussing role of a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) working with P5 at FE College) 320-322 It was better because she said "I'll sit back here \*\*\*\*\*" and sometimes I said "no, come sit on my table, you know, I don't mind": the fact that she wasn't there all the time.

Walker et al. (2004) identified the practical barriers and challenges visually impaired students encounter in their transitions through education and employment can result

in a feeling of alienation for these young people, particularly if that support appears to mediate against social inclusion.

P5 reinforced the apparently high degree of dependency that she felt towards her support worker:

*P5 339-342 Well when I was feeling down she was like “oh come on \*\*\*\* for goodness sake, you know like, “oh, come on it’s just a thing.” Erm, and yeah it was like “no, I have to sit here” and I was like, you don’t I’m in a group, you don’t need to be there all the time, “yes I do, that’s what I’m paid for”*

Oswald et al. (2013) acknowledged negative attitudes held by employers and professionals contribute to transitions which lead to negative outcomes for visually impaired young people. In terms of support to engage with work experience, P5 felt that barriers were put up that made this less successful for her:

*P5 473-475 ...I had a work experience in an infant’s school, in a pre-school and they told me I couldn’t go onto my level 3 childcare as they’d have to employ me but employ my LSA to work here as well.*

Piggott and Houghton (2007) noted that despite work experience being an important pre-requisite for successfully transitioning from education to employment, for some visually impaired young people, work experience opportunities are severely limited

Piggott and Houghton (2007) also established that support structures for young people with special educational needs who were in employment were weak and problematic to secure.

Oswald et al. (2013) acknowledge negative attitudes held by employers and professionals contribute to transitions which lead to negative outcomes for visually impaired young people.

The participants' perceptions suggest that whilst some (P4, for example) feel that the level and nature of the support was sufficient and acted to support developing independence during transition from compulsory education to further education or training, others (notably P5) found the support to be suffocating but also led to continued dependence on the support of others. P3 on the other hand admits to rejecting, almost denying any need for support to fulfil his need to feel independent and the same as his sighted peers. Carter et al. (2013) advocate that the type of support visually impaired young people with special educational needs receive, along with the variety of experience they participate in will influence and contribute to the outcomes that occur during the transition through education and to employment.

### **1b Sub-Theme: Resilience**

The participants demonstrated varied responses to perceived periods of adversity experienced during the process of transition.

When encountering set-backs less resilient responses were noted by the following participants:

*P2...3-8 I was bullied (in school) straight through from nursery to the end of year 13...school didn't want to know. Basically if I lost, if they don't do anything I lashed out, I was in the wrong. I, it was not a fun time and basically people don't care. The only ones who actually cared couldn't do anything because I was out of their control by then, I was.*

Resilience was more evident in the comments of P3 in discussing levels of support that he felt he needed in school:

*P3 71-72 And then year 9 it was like 8 of the lessons and it was when I said right I need help with this or I don't need help with this.*

P3 demonstrated further examples of resilience when he was seeking employment after transition to further education college had broken down:

*P3 475-476 I was out, it was the summer I was out of college, I was putting CV's in everywhere; shops, anywhere like that. Anywhere I could really.*

P3 talked about the need for visually impaired young people to develop resilience:

*P3 978 -984 You know your disability, you know what's wrong with you, you know your limitations. Push them by all means, but you know you can't see that picture over there so you need it enlarged. I don't know, you know you can't stay up 'til 3 o'clock in the morning doing an essay at 11 print; do it earlier, sort of thing. And I think that's what I've learnt the hard way. Whereas other, normal people can stay up 'til 3 in the morning and their eyes are fine doing their essay and they get it in by morning.*

Alternatively, P4, discussing study based challenges associated with needing to learn new Braille codes in further education college, was asked during the interview about querying what he needed to study. He commented that he needed to find out from teachers because:

*P4...422-423 I probably would've asked the same question anyway 'cause I would rather ask the question, find the answer than not ask the question and never know the answer (this response is also linked to sub-theme 2a and 2b self-advocacy and assertiveness).*

P4 considered his own transition from a mainstream local school to a residential special school, commenting:

*P4 42-44 I was alright with it (the move of school). It was the first time ever I was sent away, away from home, erm, but I managed to cope. Of course I probably felt home sick a couple of times back then.*

This suggests a significant degree of resilience.

A further example of P4 adopting and indeed promoting a resilient attitude to transition and change is worth considering:

*P4 445-447 Sometimes it's a good idea to take the opportunity when it's there, and if it's not the opportunity you're expecting at least you've took it and you've tried it. If you don't try you don't know where it will take you.*

P5 comments in relation to perceived resilience are:

*P5 915-917 ...I just think blind people stay happy, we'll try and keep happy and keep, keep smiling is what I want to say, 'cause where's there's a will there's a way.*

The accounts from the participants noted within this sub-theme highlight the differences in attitudes to challenge and adversity and suggest that levels of resilience are highly variable, with the apparently more resilient participants suggesting greater determination to “bounce back” from challenges often thrown up by the practical obstacles created by their visual impairment in differing contexts.

### **1c Sub-Theme: Problem Solving**

Interviews revealed that some participants have developed and implemented effective problem-solving approaches when faced with transition related challenges, whereas other have struggled in this respect.

Of particular concern is some evidence that P1 is rather stuck and not demonstrating significant problem solving to address the danger of him becoming essentially NEET:

*P1 350-351 (Explaining what he does at home on a daily basis) Well, 'cause, I mean (computer) games have always been a big part of what I do at home so I was practically doing the same thing...*

*P1 353-354...at home I would always be upstairs on my computer anyway, so I'm practically doing the same thing that I was 4 years ago (after leaving school).*

P4 in discussing the need during periods of transition to learn new mobility routes in unfamiliar contexts, revealed positive problem solving attitudes:

*P4 535-538 Well you got the fact of having to relearn another campus and having to relearn routes, and then you've also, you also find out that you might have been taught one way, like how to cook, then you get taught another way, then you find actually that the second way is better than the first.*

Evidence of potentially poor problem solving skills is demonstrated by comments made by P5 when commenting on what she perceives to be her uncertain future:

*P5 599 – 601 Oh well, from being “come on you can do this \*\*\*\*” all the time to getting other people to do it, to I don’t know where I’m going to go. As far as you don’t know where you’re going to go, that kind of feeling.*

It could be proposed that this also suggests poor self-advocacy skills (sub-theme 2a).

### **1d Sub-Theme: Orientation, mobility and other independent living skills**

Having access to, receiving and utilising orientation, mobility and other independent living skills was discussed by all participants, with the relative importance of these judged differently by participants in terms of their contribution to reducing dependence and increasing independence during transition points. McDonnall and Crudden (2009) identified that the use of assistive technology specific to the young person’s visual impairment had a strong relationship with enhanced employment prospects with its positive implications for developing and enhancing independence.

*P1 127-129 (commenting on choice of university course)...It was more comforting because I knew that because my friend who was also going to be studying the same thing, I knew that if I needed help then he would be there, so it was reassuring to have him there (to help P1 with his orientation, mobility and other independent living skills).*

Wenger (1998) presented the concept of Communities of Practice, whereby an individual develops a sense of identity through interacting with members of a shared community. Wenger (1998) exemplified that communities of practice are formed by shared interests and knowledge. P1’s comments suggest that his desire to maintain friendships with peers from his secondary school at university might restrict his opportunities to engage in the kind of experiences outlined by Wenger (1998).

When asked about mobility skills and his ability and confidence to travel around the university campus prior to joining the course P1 noted:

*P1 310-312...but the support teachers there, cause I told them I didn't need it (specific support with mobility training) so they weren't there for it. But I knew if I had a good walk around with my friend and he would always tag along with me.*

P2 expressed the view that orientation, mobility and independent daily living skills support had been in her experience poor. She noted that her father drives her to college and that she had not received orientation and mobility training with regard to the routes from home to college (762-764).

Similarly orientation and mobility considerations have influenced the choices of possible university places for participant 2, who noted that a friend who is currently attending \*\*\*\*\* University had said to her:

*P2 880-884 A friend of mine turned round and said if I want to go \*\*\*\*\* (university), he would support me...he will help me as much as he can 'cause he's at \*\*\*\*\* (P2 is asked what sort of things he will support her with)*

*P2 (responds)...886 – 892 But he did turn round to me and say he wouldn't recommend me going to \*\*\*\*\* because it was a city university and it was spread out....he wouldn't recommend me going there because of my sight.*

In this exchange P2 suggests that her mobility skills are poor and a determining factor as to which type of campus she could best manage.

The circumstances of each participant are clearly hugely significant when considering access to the independent living skills being considered here.

P3 discussed some of the difficulties he has experienced having to extend his established orientation and mobility skills to new contexts as he has experienced differing transitions:

*P3 640-649 It can be an inconvenience, not having a taxi from A to B.*

*(Question) So you had a taxi from home to school?*

*Yeah. And then when I went to college I was either getting a lift with my mother or catching a bus down to \*\*\*\*\* (the local town) and then walking over.*

P3 noted frustration having to rely on his parents for lifts to socialise with friends as buses are infrequent in the area that he lives:

*P3 1059-1064 That's the stuff that gets me. 'Cause the boys'll ring me up on a Sunday night come down to \*\*\*\*\*, you know have a few drinks, to watch a game, whatever. And even on some working nights they do it and likewise I can't get a lift or I can't do this, I can't do that, there's no buses or something like that. And I'm not saying my parents wouldn't, my parents would take me anywhere if they were here. But if they're not they can't.*

Participant 4 is more positive when discussing the orientation, mobility and other independent living skills he is able to draw on.

In referring to his placement at a specialist college and the impact on his mobility and independent living skills, P4 noted:

*P4 198-199 I, well I got trained to try and get everything, be as independent as I can while I was around there. They train you up until you are ready to do it independently really.*

This point is further emphasised by P4 in discussing how his mobility and orientation skills were enhanced when he attended a specialist further education college:

*P4 225-227 Because I found that they had very good support and it, like they were going to give me more independence as well, even though I've got independence, but to make sure that I had more independence and to make sure I'm on the track that I want to be. Dee (2006) identified that a majority of visually impaired young people feel that they are disadvantaged and face more significant barriers than their sighted peers, when transitioning through education and into employment.*

P4 goes on to note how transition from further education college is helping him in the following respects:

*P4 324-325 Well they're getting me in the habit of like kind of budgeting to make sure you've got all your bills and this stuff. Which will also help with your tax of course.*

P5 notes the benefits of orientation and mobility training too:

*P5...658-662 Well, it's changed my life really. 'cause before my dad would take me to \*\*\*\*\*, now I'm going up to the train on my own...(When asked about how this has impacted on her feelings of confidence P5 responded)...yeah, I'm doing it myself. Yeah I get travel assistance, but I'm mates with them, you know what I mean?*

At the same time when trying to secure work experience placements mobility related barriers have also been perceived by P5:

*P5 508-509 Well it (the work experience placement opportunity) had to be, they thought it had to be somewhere low level. Somewhere near me 'cause I couldn't, I didn't have travel experience.*

The process of transition beyond compulsory educational provision is addressed directly by the Code of Practice (2014), in which it states that local authorities, education providers and their partners should realise their ambitions in relation to independent living, meaning young people have choice, control and freedom over their lives and the support they have, their accommodation and living arrangements, including supported living. It is evident that visually impaired young people have varying experiences (both positive and negative) in terms of their own mobility and independent living skills.

Researchers such as Thom et al. (2014) recommended that visually impaired young people and their families' knowledge of transition-related options need to be enhanced. Similarly, Nagle (2001) proclaims that parents and professionals must work together to foster the independence of visually impaired young people to enhance transition outcomes from compulsory education to employment related activities.

## **2 Superordinate Theme: Personal and study-based challenges and responses to these**

A second theme to emerge from the interviews concerned the way in which the participants conceptualised the personal and study-based challenges they faced and their responses to these. This superordinate theme is broad in nature and was identified as it emerged across the data sets and captures the sub-themes of self-advocacy, assertiveness, adopting solution-focussed approaches and taking responsibility to address personal and study-based challenges. A range of differing perceptions emerged about these factors and responses to them, from both a positive and negative perspective.

### **2a Sub-Theme: Self-advocacy**

Self-advocacy skills have been shown to have a significant relationship with employment (McDonnal & Crudden, 2009). McDonnal and Crudden (2009) identified that visually impaired young people who had gained employment, believed they had more control over their destinations and were less likely to feel that powerful others had control over their lives. In addition, McDonnal and Crudden (2009) accentuated that a young person's provenances relating to views of self-determination, self-advocacy and independence, allowing them to become independent, self-determined and decisive, all of which are positive indicators of enhanced employability.

Both parents and professionals are a vital part of this process, countenancing visually impaired young people to make their own decisions in order for them to develop independence and control (Nagle, 2001). From this research, it is evident that the young people involved experienced varied abilities in terms of being effective self-advocates and in their own levels of independence, which ultimately manipulated transitional outcomes, experiences and decisions.

P1 felt that he was able to state his support needs in the school context:

*P1 26-27 I always had the option of having a support teacher in class with me, but some of the lessons I could say that I didn't need it and so then they would stay out.*

When discussing his course at university P1 appeared to lack self-advocacy skills as he realised that he was finding his course challenging:

*P1 119-121 It was kind of just like they threw both of them together and there were cases where the tutors, they weren't really in sync with each other and so they were asking one thing and then a different tutor was asking another and it was just a bit of a mess.*

This view is reinforced in the following response to a question about the university course:

*171-172...(Question) Would you say that in those 3 months or so that you were on the course that the support was adequate, was enough?*

*P1 173...Well, I actually did say to (the university staff) that I didn't need any.*

This response also suggests P1 has weak assertiveness skills (sub-theme 2b).

P2 was asked about decision making during periods of transition. She noted that as a young carer and someone who has a significant visual impairment she has had to be independent:

*P2 98 (I had to be) Very (independent), I had to be, I had no help, nothing.*

In discussing GCSE choices in retrospect, P2 did not appear to possess effective self-advocacy skills:

*P2 100-106 You know, because for me, I'll use Geography as the example, I knew nothing about the course and my strength always lied with, weather was alright, but with natural disasters and things like that. Countries as well, that was my strength. I don't want to know population, I don't want to know anything about that, it doesn't intrigue me. But looking at a country and saying right, these are the capital cities and then looking at them and seeing, and looking at the erm, plates, tectonic plates, everything, I loved that.*

Continuing on the sub-theme of lacking self-advocacy skills, particularly when choosing subject options, P2 notes:

*P2 239-245... You know, and then that could either be sent out via email to students or printed out and handed to students so they can read through what they can, what there is available to them, because I realise now, doing my A-Levels that subjects I should've done at GCSE to do things that I'm interested in, such as psychology or even philosophy, you know, I don't do. Because we're not told what subject will get you to where, and there's a massive lack (of advice). We, and if I'd known that I would've changed my subjects drastically.*

P2 talks perhaps with the benefit of hindsight in offering advice to young people who might find themselves in a similar position to herself:

*P2.775-777 I'd tell everyone to make sure you get everything you're entitled to, whether that be mobility or magnified, enlarged scripts, extra time, someone who's with you constantly like a sighted guide*

P3 was asked: (Question) Did you have any say in how much support (in secondary school you received?)

*P3 78-82 Yeah all the way. Well year 7 'cause you're still young they guided me with it, like they give it all the lessons and then from year 8 onwards if I said oh, I don't need you this lesson we're just doing practical or we're just doing something I can see they'd be like, 'ok, I'm down the corridor if you need me'. It turned out great.*

*P3 723-732 I remember times when I've just had an argument with someone 'cause they were 20:20 vision and I was partially sighted and they were telling me what I needed. Like sometimes, I've done that like...I don't know like doing little stupid, petty things. Like reading something like a document like that; that's spaced out I can see it and it's fairly good sized print. And I had someone, I've had someone over my shoulder do you need that enlarged? And I'm a fairly calm person and I'm no it's alright. And they just keep on at it. Or if I stutter on a word because I don't like reading, they'll be like oh you need that enlarged, you need that enlarged and panic. No, like.*

When asked about the transition process after leaving school P3 commented:

*P3 763-766 Not to use a cliché word I got more streetwise, I got more social sort of thing. As I said because I had to stick up for myself and say what I*

*needed and what I didn't need and I had to use my vision whereas most people that are vision impaired I find use it as a crutch sort of thing.*

An illustration of P4 demonstrating effective planning and self-advocacy skills is evident below:

*P4 170-171 \*\*\*Yeah. So I kind of have a bit of a plan in my mind then I kind of map it out, as if...*

*P4...172-174 I always knew there was a choice of coming back here (to P4's home town FE College) if there was a really big problem so I always knew that was there, but I thought it would be best to carry on and try my best.*

*P4...225-227 Because I found that they (residential further education college) had very good support and it, like they were going to give me more independence as well, even though I've got independence, but to make sure that I had more independence and to make sure I'm on the track that I want to be.*

*P4...372-374 We did look through the campus (of the local further education college) and everything but the courses didn't always look specific to the requirements that I expect to what I was expecting anyway.*

When asked about researching local FE college options and whether they were stating that they could meet P4's visual needs, P4 noted:

*P4 378-379 They (College staff) didn't say that but you could tell just by talking to them they didn't know much about it, but they have to say they have to provide as a requirement now.*

P4 promotes self-advocacy amongst visually impaired peers during periods of transition, noting:

*P4 546-548-From a blind perspective, please choose wisely, choose wisely with which school or college you choose because if you choose the wrong one, one, that mistake will affect the rest of your life.*

P5 talked about her challenging transitions from school to further education college and suggested that she may lack effective self-advocacy skills in the passage below where she indicates that her parents tended to make decisions on her behalf:

*P5 106-108 Well they would start to do the thinking for me, really, which is why I'm struggling now.*

It could also be suggested that this view acknowledges that she demonstrated a lack of assertiveness (sub-theme 2b) and difficulty taking responsibility for decision making (sub-theme 2d). However, this can potentially be problematic for P5, as research has shown overprotective parents who do not allow their children to develop and learn crucial independence skills risk experiencing a negative transition process (McConnell, 1999).

Negative self-image and poor self-advocacy skills are also suggested in the following passage by P5 in trying to secure an effective transition from college to training and employment:

*P5 545-547 Everywhere and anywhere (looking for training and employment opportunities). But the thing is, they're not going to employ me because what can I do? I'm blind. You know, I went for volunteering at a charity shop they said 'you can't volunteer here you're a health and safety hazard'.*

P5 promotes the idea of visually impaired peers being assertive in the following passage:

*P5 812-819 Don't settle for no, yeah, and...Well, if someone says 'no you can't have full time in the test, extra time actually' that's a no. Or 'no you can't work in the shop', yes I can. There shouldn't be stuff lying on the floor so I wouldn't trip up.*

P5 was asked whether or not she would have liked to have been encouraged to be more assertive in stating what she wanted out of education during periods of transition:

*P5 832-833 I wish I had that; someone saying 'well actually no, you can do something, you're not useless, do you know what I mean?'*

P5 appears to appreciate that the advice she finds herself giving to other young people in a similar position to herself rather contradicts what she has done herself:

*P5 852-854 Well I'll be saying to people well come on, you can do this, you're not useless, what you talking about? But now I've just hit the wall and I'm just like I can't do it, I know I say it to others but I can't.*

Successful transitions for visually impaired young people have been proven to transpire when positive self-image and self-determination have developed (Wong, 2004). Any potential threat to self-esteem and sense of identity during transitions can create substantial negative transitions. Similarly, Evangelou et al. (2008) found that young people who claimed to have experienced successful transitions made reference to the importance of their self-esteem and improved confidence during these times.

## **2b Sub-Theme: Assertiveness**

Previous literature has revealed that visually impaired young people have similar aspirations for their future to their sighted peers (Shaw et al., 2007), however, research has shown that for visually impaired young people, employment outcomes are different from those without disabilities (Nagle, 2001).

In commenting on being able to exercise assertiveness over choice of which further education college to attend P1's account of the process suggests a reduced level of this attribute:

*P1 44-45 Originally I wanted to go to \*\*\*\*\* College because I was going to go with my friend but my mom didn't want me to go that far.*

P1 added to this perception:

*P1 47-49 So, but and a positive with \*\*\*\*\* college was that I could have transport; I could keep the taxi's but I wouldn't have been able to have it from*

*\*\*\*\*\* because it was too far. So that was another reason why I chose \*\*\*\*\* college.*

P1's experience is not perhaps unfamiliar amongst visually impaired young people transitioning into further education. Research has shown that a lack of support, information and preparedness for further and higher education can cause alienation amongst visually impaired students and an unsuccessful transition process (Walker et al., 2004).

P2 states concerns that she was badly advised regarding qualifications, suggesting a possible lack of assertiveness in determining particular course requirements herself:

*P2 306 – 316 Which the school failed me on because I've got, you have all these booklets you have to fill out and they're horrible, and no....*

*(Question) Are they adapted for you?*

*P2 Oh yeah, but no-one actually bothered to sit down and explain to me what I was actually supposed to be doing in the first place, it wasn't structured or nothing. That was all I had left to do was fill in 6 booklets. I had done all the speeches, all the presentations, absolutely everything, all the evidence, the lot, apart from those booklets. And they don't, and they don't even enter me for it, the Welsh Baccalaureate, don't bother to help me with the booklets or nothing. And I don't get my Welsh Baccalaureate and that has had a significant impact on my university choices.*

Perhaps in response to such experiences, P2 advises that other young people in a similar position to her be more assertive in planning ahead when faced with significant transitions:

*P2 719-723 All I can say is do what's best for you. If you're looking at going to college for A-Levels or stay in school, try both. See what fits you best. Try school and discuss with your school and your college and see if you can't do 2 weeks in the school and see how for 2 weeks how things work. See how you get on and choose from there.*

Piggott and Houghton (2007) suggest that relevant employment advice and support is lacking within the visually impaired learner group, making the transition process challenging.

With reference to assertiveness, P3 was asked what levels of support he received when he went to college. He replied:

*P3...244-245 I didn't ask, I didn't opt for any. I got offered it but I thought no I'm grown up now, in the real world I'm not going to have anything so I'll do it myself.*

More negatively, when P3 was asked what level of support he could have received at college, he noted

*P3...256-258 I do know. There was a unit there (at college) and there was people there willing to help me. But as I said I wanted to be independent, young, stupid. I probably should have for the first year, but I don't need it now.*

Commenting on the nature of the support he received during his secondary school transition period, P3 noted concerns:

*P3 744-762 'Cause, 'cause one I had to stick up for myself and say no I don't need you today. Two- that helped me to get involved with the class, because when you have an older person sitting next to you, even now at my age, when you have an older person sitting next to you, you still socially lost out, but it's awkward to talk....about laddish things when you've got an older person sitting next to you.. Yeah, it's like having a sheet around you like. To other kids your age coming up to you and chatting to you about stuff that you would? Ok. Like you would have banter in class. Like I love banter at the minute, I get into it.*

P3 was asked what advice he might give to other young people in his position faced with transition:

*P3 927-933... it'd probably depend more on the person he is, sort of thing. So if he was, as you said, he didn't like being so independent I'd say to him one, do something you enjoy, don't let people guide you so much, you get me? 'Cause you can use people as a crutch but also to do something you like. Someone guiding you is different to being independent basically. So, do something you*

*enjoy, don't let people tell you what you can and can't do, decide that for yourself, and just that like, really.*

P3 continued:

*P3 940 Try to be yourself not your disability, sort of thing.*

P3 commented further on the issue of responding to the potential challenges of transitions:

*P3 1112-1114 Like I think I touched on it earlier, some people use the disability first personality second sort of thing whereas it should be swapped; personality first, disability is just there, second like.*

In discussing how P4 opted to attend a specialist residential further education college rather than a local college with apparently limited experience of meeting the needs of visually impaired students, the following views are of interest:

*P4 361-364 With most of the equipment and it's all of this stuff that you have to have when you've got a visual impairment or it doesn't matter if you've got a visual impairment, any disability really, they (the receiving further education college) have to have a certain amount of equipment that they have to provide, but when you know they can't provide it, it's difficult.*

P4 expresses some scepticism about his local further education to meet his needs:

*P4 378-379...you could tell just by talking to them they didn't know much about it (visual impairment), but they have to say they have to provide as a requirement now.*

P4 also demonstrated assertiveness in his attitudes towards employers, linking his views more generally towards possible discrimination in the workplace:

*P4...591-595 Well employers I would definitely just don't say you're, there's one thing you should definitely don't say and that's that you won't accept someone because they're blind. Don't ever say that because that's wrong. In fact, these days it's just discrimination so. So if you're taking any employee who's blind have a look at every single aspect they've got and they might have better ICT skills than yourself!*

In concluding her account P5 commented on her experiences of transition since leaving school:

*P5 762-765 Not very good to be honest. 'Cause, erm, I don't know where I'm going I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know how to do it if that makes any sense? And I used to be this girl that like, if you wanted something you go for it; now I'm like uh, what'll happen will happen, do you know what I mean?*

However, P5 then demonstrates a wish that she had been more assertive and wants other visually impaired people to state clearly what they need and what they want:

*P5 812-816 Don't settle for no, yeah.. Well, if someone says 'no you can't have full time in the test, extra time actually' that's a no. Or 'no you can't work in the shop', yes I can.*

## **2c Sub-Theme: Solution focussed approaches**

This sub-theme has links in research by McDonnal and Crudden (2009) and Nagle (2001) who considered the strategies and approaches adopted by visually impaired young people who had been successful in gaining employment. A positive, solution focussed approach adopted by participants in this research provides similarities to the attitudes to challenge highlighted in the research literature.

P1 provides a somewhat non-committal response to decision making and adopting solution focussed approaches during transition in the context of considering the extent to which the participants are able/ and/ or willing to take responsibility for their own decision making:

*P1...407-409 I think in that case it would be your, you could ask everyone; like your family, your friends and the support teachers or teachers or careers advisors. Just, there's no harm in going to everyone and asking, so.*

P2, in being critical of support structures in 6<sup>th</sup> Form, noted that in terms of focused assistance she received:

*P2 28-31 Very little. I received enlarged items and that was it. That was all I received. I, apart from exams where I had my extra time. ...That was all the help I had.*

P2 seems to have received little guidance to seek solution focused approaches to addressing such apparent difficulties. Links with assertiveness (sub-theme 2b) and problem solving (sub-theme 1c) are evident.

Friere and Macedo (1999) define the role of the teacher as one who provides students with problems and challenges, which allow the learner to analyse their own experiences and encourage a critical understanding of their own experiences. More evident solution focussed approaches are illustrated in P2's description of her needs as a student and a young carer:

*P2 583-588 ...You know, I was sat in the common room one day because my sight had gone and we should've told the staff, but if I'd have done that I'd have been sent home and even if at home my sight goes, I'm still a young carer, I still have to be the one doing the stuff, doing the food preparation, everything else, I'm still the one that has to do things, you know despite my own difficulties I have got to work around them.*

O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) have promoted the importance for young people of being given sufficient opportunities to experience identity development work and support adjusting socially and emotionally prior to and during their transitions. In striving to solve the practical problems he found himself facing P3 discussed solutions that he devised for himself:

P3 suggested that in his experience visually impaired students should be asking for their learning to be personalised. He went on to cite an example:

*P3...842-580 I don't know, I think because they teach so many students they generalise; they should be taught not to generalise, like. One of my really good teachers was my science teacher, Miss. \*\*\*\*. She weren't the best teacher-teacher, she weren't the best at telling facts to you but she was good at learning her students; knowing right, this guy's better when I teach it this way,*

*this guy's better when I teach it this way. Knowing different types of people sort of thing. I think that I 'm good at that because of her maybe. I'm good at picking up on different people and learning how they work sort of thing. Like I know I'm better if you give something to me, either leave me to work it out or give me a little bit of assistance.*

This is further supported by Beach's (1999) reference to the need for young people's learning to be encouraged take a more flexible and personalised approach to problem solving.

P3 demonstrates adopting a solution focused approach when considering future career options related to transition:

*P3 1075-1077 Being in the \*\*\*\*\*(city) would be great because I could work at one of the \*\*\*\*\*city gyms 'cause there are plenty of gyms in \*\*\*\*\*. Buses drive on Sunday, they go anytime really. So I got that freedom.*

P4 reflects on how he addresses problems:

*P4...129-131 Well, I kind of think of my decisions as I go along really, so I kind of do it as I go through my years I guess. So I kind of work, I do my work and all of this stuff and then think of what I want to do and all this stuff.*

*P4...204-205 It made me very independent on trying to get out and about to places. Yeah, as much as I could, yeah. (Question to follow up this issue: If you'd stayed at home...do you think you would've had the same amount of independence and support or, or don't you, can't you judge that?) I may have had to go a bit of a longer way around it but I imagine I would've found a way to solve the problem.*

*P4 295-307 Well even with all of these absences (from College due to illness) they kind of they try and contact me as much as they can anyway while I'm off to try and get some bits and bobs anyway so I always try and send some bits and bobs if I can while I'm absent anyway.*

*(Question: So they college send you work and you'll try and do some work?) Yeah. I try and do my best to get it done but if I can't then I'll just send an email saying I'll get that done when I'm back....Well of course when I find bits interesting, what I find really interesting in the course I just go and research into it even more. So I kind of think about it in terms of trying to encourage myself look at it even more into it and then hopefully it'll help me get the course improve as well.*

P5 suggests a general absence of adopting a more solution focused approach to her studies and planning for transitions:

*P5 133-135 I didn't really do any planning to be honest. It was just that time when in year 10 and 11 and that's it, you know. Forget about what's going on in the future, so I did, you know.*

## **2d Sub-Theme: Taking responsibility**

Research conducted by O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) has underlined the need for young people to take responsibility in their problem solving and decision making prior to and during the transition period. They suggested that young people must be provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in order to make mistakes and learn from their own experiences. Young people should be actively involved in their own transition experiences, with the emphasis on support but not direct teaching from others.

P1 demonstrated that in earlier secondary education contexts he was encouraged to take responsibility for deciding his levels of in-class support:

*P1 26-27 I always had the option of having a support teacher in class with me, but some of the lessons I could say that I didn't need it and so then they would stay out.*

P2, in balancing her life between studies and being a young carer, outlined some solutions to really significant dilemmas in her life, taking responsibility for some of the decisions she has made:

*P2...634-639 I don't know. If I wasn't going to university then I wouldn't have, I would've kept up with everything I was doing and my studies 'cause I done it through GCSE's I was used to having to juggle. I'm used to juggling the two and I'm also used to the fact my school work comes second to being a carer, you know my parents come first and you know, even when I'm at university, my parents'll still come first.*

When discussing transition related experiences, P2 offers an interesting definition of this process that demonstrates a willingness to take responsibility:

*P2 453-456 To me the word transition is to move on, to spread your wings, to learn, to learn to stand on your own two feet and realise that you've got to do things on your own, you are responsible for what you do. If you want to do something then you can do it if you put your mind to it.*

O'Donnell & Tobbell (2007) acknowledged that students starting university preferred to find their own way and make their own decisions, through making their own mistakes and gaining experiences, rather than being told what to do. This is highlighted in P3's responses, where he acknowledges that he wanted to take responsibility for decisions made regarding key transition points, as evidenced here:

*P3 96-98 My parents guided, everyone guided me, everyone said, 'ah, you could look at this' and showed me everything possible, but I had the final say sort of thing. I was really happy about that.*

When asked a question about the levels of support available at college, P3 responded:

*P3...244-245 I didn't ask, I didn't opt for any. I got offered it but I thought no I'm grown up now, in the real world I'm not going to have anything so I'll do it myself.*

P3 takes responsibility for this attitude, choosing not to apportion this viewpoint to anyone else but himself.

*P3...764-766 As I said because I had to stick up for myself and say what I needed and what I didn't need and I had to use my vision whereas most people that are vision impaired I find use it as a crutch sort of thing.*

P4 comments broadly on his experiences being given increasing degrees of responsibility.

*P4...167-169 It was they give you kind of more responsibility on yourself and you kind of put more responsibility into your work. When you tried and use as*

*much words as you can yourself but in, when you know there's a little bit of help needed then you do ask for it.*

P4 demonstrates in the passage below that he is willing to take responsibility for the decisions that he makes:

*P4 445-447 Sometimes it's a good idea to take the opportunity when it's there, and if it's not the opportunity you're expecting at least you've took it and you've tried it. If you don't try you don't know where it will take you.*

P5's response to a Question put to her: What kind of support did you get, in terms of the academic side of things?

*P5 89-95 Not really, there wasn't anything that I could say, all the time help. It was basically, '\*\*\*\*'s not happy, you could just sit there and do your work quietly', know. It was never, 'right \*\*\*\*, this is how we do it, this is what we're going to do', you know. I would've prob- liked that to be honest, because that would've got me motivated.*

This is an illustration perhaps of an unwillingness to take responsibility for her own actions and decision making. This is further reflected in the following comments:

*P5 680-684 Well they're meant to get you somewhere (teaching staff and support staff in schools), meant to help you get somewhere. And I've failed to see them try really hard, you know, um...They don't know how to, they don't know what to do with visually impaired people.*

### **3 Superordinate Theme: The availability and influence of support systems**

A third theme to emerge from the interviews concerned the way in which the participants conceptualised the availability and influence of support systems that they experienced and their responses to these. This superordinate theme is varied in nature and encompasses more formal institutional structures, family, friendship and peer groups and was identified as it emerged across the data sets and captures the sub-themes of family involvement and guidance in decision making, peer and

friendship group influence and the availability and effectiveness of specialist advice regarding study and career choices. P3 recounts the importance of family support and understanding during his transition process, which enabled him to become independent. The affiliation between both young people and their families is acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of the young person's career planning process (Nagle, 2001). It is imperative that families understand the capabilities of their children, rather than embracing overprotective strategies in which their children do not acquire independence related skills (McConnell, 1999).

### **3a Sub-Theme: Family involvement and guidance in decision making**

Family involvement in the process of transition beyond compulsory educational provision is directly addressed by The Code of Practice (2014), in which it states that "Local authorities, education providers and their parents should work together to help young people to realise their ambitions in relation to; higher education and/or employment, independent living and participating in society (Code of Practice, 2014/DfE, 2014, p.122).

This view is supported by Burchinal et al. (2002) in considering the role of family involvement during the decision making process as arguably the most significant factor for positive transitions to occur.

The strong influence of family is evident in P1 discussing possible FE College options.

*P1 44-45...Originally I wanted to go to \*\*\*\*\* because I was going to go with my friend but my mom didn't want me to go that far.*

This perception is added to below:

*P1 78-81 Yeah, she didn't want me to go as far because of the, I couldn't have transport to \*\*\*\*\* so she didn't want me, she wasn't really that secure about going all that way. But I think if, I did give in myself in the end, but I think if I did pressure more then I probably, my mom would've let me. So it was my choice to go to \*\*\*\*\*.*

At this transition point there also appears to be little mention of a role for specialist advice from either a study or possible future career perspective (sub-theme 3b Presence of specialist advice and career choice). Thom et al. (2014) suggested that a better understanding of transition-related options is essential between young people and their families.

It is important that parents and professionals allow visually impaired young people to make their own decisions, in order for them to develop independence (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009). P2 in her role as a young carer may have experienced somewhat reduced family involvement and guidance from them in terms of decision making concerning transitions.

P2 goes on to reflect on her need to adjust her involvement as a young carer at a certain point in the future:

*P2 740- 745 The biggest change is also my hardest of having to step back, of having to let go. Of having to reconcile the guilt of having to let my parents get hurt with the knowledge that it's for their own good, reconciling that you have to be hard to be kind, cruel to be kind. You know it's hard, and it's been one of the hardest things I've ever had to do and you know I think it'll be the hardest thing I'll have to do.*

*P2 463-471... In many ways going into college is harder because I am a young carer, so I am going from college, home, I have no respite really. So that is an awful lot harder. Whereas in school, yeah, I'd have lessons, I was a student, but then I had a free lesson, I could just sit hang around in the common room, mess about, play jokes, play games, have a laugh; I was young. I had no outside worries. Yeah I knew that if something happened and I got a phone call I'd have to go but on those lessons where I had no work, nothing, it was amazing, you know. I can't describe it. It's, I was free. The only way I can describe it, I was free from all the responsibilities.*

Family influence if not guidance may have had some effect on P3 when he noted that transition to trying to secure an apprenticeship had family-based antecedents:

*P3 211-213 All my cousins are engineers and stuff like that. I applied for an apprenticeship straight coming out of school and I got up to the interview stage, and but they said, 'go get some experience in college and come back next year'.*

P3 further considers the role of his family in decision making around transition:

*P3 737-740 My parents have always tried to raise me as an independent confident person. I don't think comp (secondary school) helped me with that sort of thing because I had, like in comp if I had let them give me all the help they wanted to I wouldn't be the person I am today.*

P3 recounts the importance of family support and understanding during his transition process, which enabled him to become independent. The affiliation between both young people and their families is acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of the young person's career planning process (Nagle, 2001). It is imperative that families understand the capabilities of their children, rather than embracing overprotective strategies in which their children do not acquire independence related skills (McConnell, 1999).

Parents and professionals must collaborate to cultivate the independence of the visually impaired young person, which will ultimately enhance the transition outcomes from compulsory education to employment (Nagle, 2001). P4 readily acknowledges the influence of his family, largely speaking in this case, his mother in helping him address challenges originating in transitions and to plan for them:

*P4 136-139 I've, I kind of work with my mom sometimes to make sure I get these plans pretty, in my mind right, otherwise. Because sometimes I find that I actually know what I'm on about but I just need someone who knows my knowledge to make sure it's all mapped out properly.*

P4 also discussed how being proficient with technology enables him to keep in close contact with friends and family:

*P4 428-347 (Question) What about relationships with family and friends?*

*P4 Yeah family and friends I always keep in contact with them, whether I'm home or away, it doesn't matter where I am.*

*(Question) What do you use to keep in contact with them? And how do you keep in contact with them?*

*P4 Phone, all the, all the technology basically.....Phones, laptops, iPods, iPads.... Yeah I text.*

The involvement of both young people and their families has been acknowledged as being crucial in the career planning process (Nagle, 2001, and addressing challenges and difficulties during the transition process should be a collective process involving both the parents and young person.

P5 Was asked what role her family had in terms of encouraging progress before leaving school.

*P5 107-108 Well they would start to do the thinking for me, really, which is why I'm struggling now.*

McConnell (1999) argues that overprotective parents put their children at risk of not acquiring fundamental independence skills

When asked about choice of further education college, and the role of her parents and family P5 noted

*P5 184-185 Well I didn't really choose it, my mom and dad did, because I just didn't know what to do; like now, I just don't know what to do. My heads all over the shop."*

P5 acknowledges the supportive role of her parents in helping her become more independent in mobility terms:

*P5 225-228... I'll admit my mom and dad were very protective of me, but seen as I've got with guide dogs and I'm with them, they've taught me the routes, I'm now independent and I'm travelling into London on my own, you know.*

The involvement of both young people and their families has been acknowledged as being crucial in the career planning process (Nagle, 2001) and addressing challenges and difficulties during the transition process should be a collective process involving both the parents and young person.

Rather than espousing an overprotective strategy, and denying their children from learning fundamental independence related skills, it is imperative that parents and carers recognise the capabilities of their children, in order to expedite a paramount transition process (Nagle, 2001).

### **3b Sub-Theme: Peer and friendship group influence**

As mentioned earlier, Wenger's (1998) concept of Communities of Practice emphasises the process of developing a sense of identity through interacting with members of a shared community, all of whom share similar interests, knowledge and goals. Visually impaired students may or may not build interactions and friendships with other visually impaired peers and form a small community of practice of their own. Contradictory evidence is available from the data gathered during this research study. It is, however, to be expected that visually impaired young people will be influenced by their peers with regards to their decision making process surrounding further education.

P1 appears to have been heavily influenced by peers and friends in his decision making at points of significant transition; in this case, moving from a further education college to university.

*P1 107 – 110 Well, we went to, 'cause I went to \*\*\*\*\* (university) and I'd heard a lot of good things about it, even my tutor, he went there as well. And so I went to the open day and after that I was pretty much decided that me, in fact me and all my friends were decided that we were going to go there.*

Questioning about decision making concerning choice of university course developed:

*Question 122 – 129: Right. And you know when you decided to go to \*\*\*\*\* university, you mentioned some of your friends were going, how much of an influence was that on your decision-making about going to \*\*\*\*\*?*

*P1 It definitely made it easier, knowing that I was going with people.*

*Question: In what way?*

*P1 It was more comforting because I knew that because my friend who was also going to be studying the same thing, I knew that if I needed help then he would be there, so it was reassuring to have him there.*

However, research has found that friendships which are formed through compulsory education can be lost during the transition to further education or employment, and are therefore likely to have an adverse effect upon the individual; transitions can 'rupture' due to a change in relationships or interactions. Meeting new people involves an adjustment to self-identity, with regards to how the self is reflected through interactions with others (Zittoun, 2006)

P2 demonstrated some largely negative views of the influence of peers and friends during the transition process:

*P2 3-6...I was bullied straight through from nursery, straight through to the end of year 13. And, with I repeated year 12. I was bullied straight through; school didn't want to know. Basically if I lost, if they don't do anything, I lashed out, I was in the wrong. I, it was not a fun time and basically people don't care.*

P3 discusses the influence of peers on his interests and experiences during periods of transition and goes on to comment on the possibility of him attending a specialist

college for visually impaired students as opposed to local provision during the period of transition after leaving compulsory education:

*P3 609-614 I don't like being different. Most of my mates going to \*\*\*\* College, all my mates going to \*\*\*\* College and I go to \*\*\*\*. Some of my mates, one of my mates went to \*\*\*\* to do stone masonry, but he went to do stone masonry and now he owns his own business and loves it. But if I went to \*\*\*\* College just to do, I don't know, something like maths, what's the point in that like, when I can stay here and do it?*

P4 discussed how his peer group at his specialist residential school may have influenced his thinking regarding transition to further education college (another specialist residential context):

*P4 255-261 Other people in \*\*\*\*(special school) was having a bit of a similar thing, having a look through (specialist further education college) and all of this as well and they were saying this might be a good idea.*

*(Question) So these were other students, other kids you knew?*

*P4 Yeah.*

*(Question) What about teachers at \*\*\*\* (school), what did they say? Did they encourage you or did they disapprove?*

*P4 Again they didn't have much about it, the teachers it was mainly students.*

The teacher-student relationships is of critical importance when analysing school adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1997) with positive teacher-student relationships providing a foundation for positive school and post-school transitions (Burchinal et al., 2002)

P5 On reflecting on her first year at further education college with particular respect to peer group influences and relationships, noted:

*P5 259 -264 I just felt a bit alone because I didn't have no friends. I felt a bit of an outcast 'cause I had a white cane and an LSA (learning support assistant) with me. (In considering the role of the LSA and the impact of this kind of support on friendships) P5 noted:*

P5 She (the LSA) even sat and had dinner with me, so no one wanted to come up to me.

Successful transitions involve the process of social interaction, active participation and building friendships. Failure to engage in these processes will ultimately resort in a negative transition process (Zittoun, 2006).

### **3c Sub-Theme: Presence of specialist advice regarding study and career choice**

Specialist advice does not, according to P1, to have been either available or did not have significant influence over GCSE option choices at the transition point between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4:

*P1 14-17 And a few of them (teachers) then were truthful and said this isn't really good for you (due to visual impairment). There was media studies and they said that there was a lot of visual stuff involved in that, so that was, one day take that. So I chose, in the end I chose history, music, business studies and graphic design.*

Bouck (2012) found that young people with special educational needs felt they faced additional challenges during their transitions which included gaining encouragement to enter pathways into training/employment.

The degree to which P1 received specialist advice when considering transition from compulsory education into FE college is also open to question:

*P1 44-45...Originally I wanted to go to \*\*\*\*\* FE College because I was going to go with my friend but my mom didn't want me to go that far.*

During the transition from FE college to university P1 discussed his course choices, with again there being little apparent influence or input from specialist advisory sources:

*P1 114-117... Yeah in film production and music technology. I only chose the film production and music technology because the way they described it, it was they took the best of both courses and put them into one. But it was the first year that they were running the course and it wasn't that great.*

During the interview P1 was asked what he would advise other students with similar needs to himself to have done:

*P1 184-185 I think you definitely need to look more into it and see what, see every kind of support there is for you. I mean everyone's different. For me I was fine, but others may not be.*

For P1 there continues to be a lack of specialist advice as he reflected on his current options (he was at the time of the interview NEET):

*P1 239-241 I've been thinking about getting into things with helping children 'cause I know that my experiences can be very helpful. But I haven't really got much further with that. But it's a thought in my head.*

P1's experience is similar to other visually impaired students. Piggott and Houghton (2007) revealed that relevant employment advice and support has been lacking amongst visually impaired students

When asked about the availability of specialist advice and referral to such provision, P1 responded:

*P1 248 There was the local VI service that would come and visit; I think I would start there.*

This suggests that beyond the local authority sensory support service who will have worked with P1 some 4 years previously, P1 does not have contact with a specialist service. Additional support is likely to be needed by visually impaired young people to allow for the transference of knowledge to new environments (Beach, 1999).

P2 was often critical of what she perceived to be a lack of specialist advice relating to her key transition points: when asked if she had received advice regarding GCSE options, P2 replied:

*P2 87 No (P2 was then asked if she would have benefitted from advice)*

*P2 89-92 I would've, yeah. I knew nothing about the courses at all. I mean if I know what I did now about the subject I was choosing I wouldn't have picked Geography. No way would I have taken Geography because it is, human geography you study, nah. My strength's not human geography.*

Houghton (2007) found that support structures for visually impaired young people who were transitioning from compulsory education and preparing for employment or who had entered employment are very weak and problematic to secure.

P2 reinforces this point of view when describing the method she said she was encouraged to adopt when choosing A level course in 6<sup>th</sup> Form:

*P2 159-160 ...basically, all we were told was regarding choices was to think about what we enjoyed.*

*P2 221-231 So that going in (to choose subject options) you would have an exact idea of what subjects would work for you and what wouldn't. Someone to actually sit down with you and say 'right, what are you looking at doing? This this and this, why?' And actually take you through the process of are these going to help you in the future. Have you got any idea what you want to look at when you go to university....For someone to actually have people to sit down and go through what these courses entail, what they're about, what they're like, things you need, things you don't.*

Inadequate planning, support and progress tracking of visually impaired young people has been highlighted as a major concern (Fioerentino et al., 1998) and it has been recommended that improved communication and coordination is needed amongst professionals to achieve this.

This theme is expanded by P2 who commented further on her A level choices and their link to possible vocational routes:

*P2 238-245... because I realise now, doing my A-Levels that subjects I should've done at GCSE to do things that I'm interested in, such as psychology or even philosophy, you know, I don't do. Because we're not told what subject will get you to where, and there's a massive lack (of advice)...and if I'd known that I would've changed my subjects drastically.*

P3 noted that he would have benefitted from specialist advice as he was making some transition-based decisions that did not assist him with the benefit of hindsight. However, he also admits that he would not have followed any such specialist advice:

*P3 188-189 It was a wake up 'cause I think I could've had the option to have had help but I did engineering so I didn't, like I said, I didn't want to be different.*

P3 considers the degree to which specialist advice was available to him further in the following exchange:

*P3 198-209 (Question) Ok, ok. Tell me about advice you got either from teachers at school, people like careers advisors or is it careers Cymru, or?*

*P3 I didn't get, I got it through the school sort of thing.*

*((Question) So through your teachers?*

*P3 Yeah we had a careers officer in school....So I got it mostly through there.*

*(Question) Ok, and what was the reaction when you said you wanted to do engineering at college?*

*P3 There was a bit of apprehension because of my eyes but they said go for it. Because they knew what I was like, they knew I liked to be different, I liked to be, do you know what I mean? Whatever I like to do I do.*

A further example of apparent lack of specialist guidance and advice, or at least accepting it, is evident in the following passage:

*P3 283-300 I passed, yeah. I didn't pass too great but I passed. I applied for the same apprenticeship, it's in \*\*\*\*\*(name of a company) in \*\*\*\*\*(local town). Have you heard of that?*

*Interviewer: I have yes.*

*P3 They make tin cans. I Right. You didn't get it?applied for that, I didn't get it.....*

*P3 Yeah, I didn't even get as far as I did the first year.*

*Question: Do you know why?*

*P3 6000 applicants. Pick of the bunch isn't it?... Yeah, so I don't know. I went onto, I went onto do level 3 in engineering then.*

*Question: At the same college?*

*P3 Yeah*

*Question: And who advised you to do that?*

*P3 I just thought to myself I didn't get it last year, I'll try next year.*

P4 outlined an example of how specialist advice had helped him plan during transition regarding GCSE options:

*77-91 (Question) And did you speak to any careers advisors, at that point about your GCSE choices or any Connexions people?*

*P4 Yeah, I was speaking to a careers advisor at that point as well; Careers Wales...*

*(Question) And where was that then....was that back here (in Wales) or was that...?*

*P4 They're back here, but they help with the choices anyway to make sure everything's all set up and I don't make the right, wrong mistakes.*

*(Question) Did you feel that, at that point back when you were in year 9 or 10 that that advice was useful?*

*P4 Well, it was helpful by a lot because as I said I had to go back a year anyway so I had to of course use them to put a plan into place to make sure that that was all sorted as well, on top. So was all, it's all interesting.*

P4 commented further on the presence and the effectiveness of specialist advice regarding study and career choices:

*P4 142-147 I kind of, I mainly rely on my family really. Sometimes it'll be Careers Wales, of course and maybe other companies as well.*

*(Question) Have you found Careers Wales useful over the years?*

*P4 Yeah they are very useful for anyone in Wales anyway!*

*(Question) And are they useful for people with a visual impairment?*

*P4 Yeah visually impaired, if you're visually impaired yeah, especially.*

Hewett et al. (2011) expressed a need for better planning, preparation and information in the transition from school for visually impaired young people, with dedicated transitions workers supporting the young person through the process (Keil, 2011).

P5 complained that she received little specialist advice when considering what her study options should be when transitioning to post GCSE courses. When asked whether she had received professional advice from a careers advisor or Connexions, P5 responded:

*P5 144 No, not really. It was just, 'oh, do the courses you enjoy'.*

P5 noted the rather haphazard way she found herself studying health and social care at a local further education college:

*P5 217-219 Well I wanted to help people, that's all I said to them, so they chose health and social care and I thought that sounds like a good job, I'll go for it. You know, and then childcare, I like kids, I'll go with it.*

P5 reported that this course ended negatively because work experience proved very hard to secure due to her visual impairment.

Nagel (2001) advocates that visually impaired young people need to be taught job-seeking strategies in order to find employment, as their sighted peers are more likely to secure such opportunities.

P5 referred to the advice she has received following leaving school; "I didn't have, I didn't have a set:

*P5 279-281...you can either do this or that”, you know. If you’d said you know, if there was a job specifically for blind or partially sighted people, or if you want to be a receptionist there’s that job...*

P5 was asked if she would have liked specialist advice about employment and if there was anyone to give such advice. She replied:

*P5 289-290 No they said you’re just going to have to try these things and if you can’t do it then you’re going to have to, I was like that doesn’t help me, does it?*

P5 was asked what would have helped her:

*P5 292-295 Just giving me “right you could do this”. I was going to, I was going to the Connexions saying you do not know anything about blind and visual impairment, what I can do? ‘No, you’re going to have to look on the internet’. I was like I’ve been trying to do that.*

P5 was concerned that she lacked regular support and advice about her progress at further education college:

*P5 373-378 I only got told I wasn’t doing very well when the course ended; when I couldn’t go any further, you know?*

P5 stated concern that in seeking specialist advice regarding future study and career choice she encountered little in the way of relevant support:

*P5 692-694 I don’t think they know enough about visual impairment, I mean to be told “oh I don’t know anything about visual impairment” well, no I need help, you know what I mean.”*

### **3d Sub-Theme: Guidance and Mentoring**

Transitions which occur within educationally-based activities, such as from education to employment, are otherwise known as mediational transitions (Beach, 1999). Mediational transitions include career advice, lessons on applying for jobs and the exploring opportunities to gain work experience whilst still at school. Due to high

levels of unemployment rates amongst visually impaired young people, researchers and practitioners have begun implementing interventions to enhance employability (Keil, 2008). These interventions include: carer awareness and job-seeking skills, independent living skills, parenting involvement, work experience, social skills and self-concept, however, there is yet to be a systematic review of their success (Cavenaugh & Geisen, 2012).

P1 would appear to be a young person who would benefit from guidance and mentoring. As noted in the previous sub-theme of the presence or otherwise of specialist advice regarding study and career choice, P1 was at the time of research interviews NEET and in this respect it is interesting to note his response when asked how he would advise a young person with similar needs to himself:

*P1 184-185 I think you definitely need to look more into it (access to advice) and see what, see every kind of support there is for you. I mean everyone's different. For me I was fine, but others may not be.*

Unfortunately, this is a piece of advice that P1 seems to have struggled to adopt himself.

P2 also wanted her school to adopt a more systematic approach to explaining GCSE and A level options at key transition points:

*P2 206-218 Well, GCSE and A-Level- there were slightly different things I would've benefitted from..... Someone to actually sit down with you and say 'right, what are you looking at doing? This this and this, why?' And actually take you through the process of are these going to help you in the future. Have you got any idea what you want to look at when you go to university, is probably a better one for when you do A-Levels.*

P3 discusses his attitude to his visual impairment in response to a question:

*214-222 Question: And what influence at that point did you think your visual impairment had on the people that were talking to you, advising you, interviewing you?*

*P3 Well, anything if I feel out of form I always remember this question someone asked me the other day. It always says 'do you consider yourself to have a disability?' And I don't consider myself to have a disability. ...Because a disability would be, for me, having something and then losing it...I've never had perfect sight, so I haven't lost it.*

This attitude might imply that P3 has lacked a degree of mentoring and guidance in the past about his identity and level of need and how he should interpret this.

This perspective is echoed in the following quotation in response to a question about if and how P3 asked for support at college:

*P3 244-245 I didn't ask, I didn't opt for any. I got offered it but I thought no I'm grown up now, in the real world I'm not going to have anything so I'll do it myself.*

The possible need for a mentor and further guidance for P3 is suggested in these passages where P3 responds to a question about what issues have concerned him during periods of transition:

P4 alludes to the importance of guidance and possible mentoring in the following exchange:

*P4 310-325.. it's kind of like the step between one school to college kind of, like the secondary set into sixth form basically. That's the kind of thing it means in my head, and hopefully it is for everyone else as well. ....(Question) But also what about the thought of transition from college to what would be the next transition?*

*P4 Of college, to kind of into the work environment.*

*(Question) And how do you feel about that, in terms of thinking about that and going into the work environment?*

*P4 It kind of, it will be done, it just may take time. But I would rather take time than be too slow.*

*(Question) And do you feel that the course that you're on now and the experiences you're having at college are preparing you for employment?*

*P4 Yeah they're doing their best to prepare me.*

*(Question) What sort of things are happening to prepare you?*

*P4 Well they're getting me in the habit of like kind of budgeting to make sure you've got all your bills and this stuff*

P5 suggests that a visually impaired mentor would be inspiring to her and to others in a similar position to herself when she was asked that if she “could wave a magic wand” what would have made a difference to her:

*P5 795-796 Maybe having a blind person say “if you want to get into my job then this is how you do it.... if they've got their own business ‘do you want to get into your own business? Yeah, this is how you do it’, you know, it'd be so much easier. Then I'd have an aim, a goal, you know.*

P5 feels that such a person would be able to relate to her and have empathy for her situation.

It is essential that we understand the thoughts, feelings and sense of self that young people have throughout the transition process in order for us to be able to support the transition in the best possible way and to facilitate interventions within school, employment and the time between these two contexts that are likely to improve the transition process. Young people need to be given sufficient opportunities to experience identity development and support work and adjustment prior to and during their transitions (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

#### **4.4 Reflective Discussion: Theorising educational transitions: communities, practice and participation - What do this study's findings contribute to existing knowledge?**

##### **4.4.1 Introduction**

Having considered the findings and noted significant research that relates to some of the findings, the substantive theoretical and methodological issues will now be considered linking key findings with the research questions as well as the literature reviewed earlier.

The analysis of data and the broad outline of findings outlined above will now contribute to a more in-depth theoretical discussion of transition relating the experiences of the participants to socio-cultural theory and how issues including independence and identity are of relevance.

A useful theoretical framework for considering transition can be grounded within a social ontological perspective that views participation, or lack of participation, as of critical importance. The identities of individual students is shaped by participation, with learning and life trajectories significantly influenced accordingly. This perspective is developed below by referring to relevant research and theory.

O'Donnell (2009) considered transition and its characteristic discontinuities in three differing contexts; commencing formal schooling, moving from primary to secondary school and attending university. This research study extends the exploration of discontinuities considerably by analysing the experiences of visually impaired young people who have become at risk of becoming NEET, where they may have experienced relatively brief episodes of further education beyond compulsory education, with inconsistent transition pathways characterised variously by periods of short-term employment, training and non-engagement in education, training and employment.

This study's critical review of literature, supported by its findings suggest that transition is a phenomenon lacking theoretical scrutiny leading to an immaturely

developed over- arching understanding of it and as a consequence largely absent modes for intervening are considered in the research literature. In offering a critique of research looking at transition O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) consider that a lack of theory relating to transition has led to the development of uncreative and narrow methodologies in research terms and ultimately under-developed focus on the psychology of transition. This current research study has in this regard set out specifically to achieve a "rich picture" of the lived experiences of young people engaged in challenging transitions following leaving compulsory education.

#### **4.4.2 Communities of Practice**

In my view the communities of practice theoretical framework is helpful and significant in understanding and explaining this study's findings.

Communities of practice are formed of practices which, through its participants, define a community; the community is made up of its participants and evolves through the actions of its participants who are developing as practice proceeds, shaping a dynamic future. A community of practice is not a rigid structure with consistently applied practices; changing practices develop as members join and negotiation and exchange of participation and practices occurs amongst these members. Within communities of practice learning is located not in the individual but is evident within participants, the activity and the outside context. Therefore, students engaged in transition have the opportunity to enlist in new communities, becoming potential participants themselves after initially being peripheral participants (Wenger, 1999), although the act of participating during transition is influenced by a wide variety of factors which can be further analysed by applying an ecological model. The current study has gone some way to achieving this by encouraging study

participants to reflect on eco-systemic as well as community of practice focused factors during their transition journeys prior to and during their lived experiences after leaving compulsory education.

### **Transition and Discontinuity**

Theories derived from the communities of practice research have been utilised by me to highlight the psychology that underpins the foundation of transition, with specific attention on the perceptions of independence and the identity of a small group of learners and how their knowledge changes and develops within the process.

In the current study and indeed others referred to above, discontinuity is clearly a likely outcome of transition between educational settings, with participants encountering significant changes in terms of relationships, location, social, vocational or academic expectations and levels of control over events and one's management of these changes, as outlined by Fabian (2000). The findings of this research study provide ample and detailed examples of a variety of such discontinuities that encompass aspects of identity and feelings of independence. The young people's experiences detailed and analysed in this research study have, almost without exception, been characterised by significant challenges in managing their respective transition experiences in terms of maintaining placements in further education settings, training contexts and employment. Levels of independence and dependence on others, weak self-advocacy and assertiveness-based skills, in some instances under-developed living skills and inadequate support systems have been highlighted.

These discontinuities, coming to terms with them and their consequences and people's reaction to them certainly justifies the current study and should prompt further research.

Learning from related research findings that consider discontinuities between and within phases of compulsory education can offer important insights into the experiences of young people when they leave compulsory education.

### **School-based Transition**

In considering transition to school, Dockett and Perry (2004) promote the idea that transition programmes at this age which explicitly acknowledge the individual nature of the process and the notion of adjustment to school emphasised, can be supportive. The current research study's findings suggest at least a lack of perceived planning and preparation on the part of participants that is geared to their individual needs. Birch et al. (1997) noted that the teacher-child relationship is of critical importance when analysing school adjustment. Burchinal et al. (2002) state that the most significant factor in preparation for positive transition to school is a family's high socio-economic status but do also note that a positive teacher-child relationship can provide the foundation for positive school transition for families from lower socio-economic contexts. However, the chosen methodology does not adequately provide a clear insight into the nature or qualities of this relationship that leads to an explanation of why family background provides the stated foundation for successful transition.

Notably criticism of lack of the child's voice in transition to school research is raised by Dockett and Perry (2002). They interviewed children about what made transition to school successful, finding that knowledge of the school communities' rules was

considered to be vital. This suggests that discovering how children find out rules and apply this understanding to the school context is worthy of further research. In the current research study a lack of advice, guidance and mentoring are raised as important themes, with concerns about weak self-advocacy, resilience, problem-solving, adoption of solution focused approaches linked to an absence of listening to the views of young people or indeed young people being adequately taught and prepared to outline their concerns during their transition journeys.

Although recognition that transition to school has been researched utilising ecological theory, evident in work by La Paro et al. (2000), Podmore et al. (2003) propose that a socio-cultural perspective is supportive of understanding the context of school for each child. In a critique, Tobbell (2005) acknowledges that the reliance on interview data does provide rich information but note that the self-report approach presents with limitations.

In considering this overview of research, Lave and Wenger's (1991) development of a conceptualisation of learning as emanating from participating in acknowledged and valued communities of practice is emphasised. Research outlined above rather neglects that which occurs in the classroom; the learning that develops from participating in common practices. It is the content of that which is learned and the very nature of relationships that develop in this context that appear unexplored. Themes evident in this study suggest that participating in communities of practice after leaving school have been problematic for the participants in this study and that being able to be or feel included has resulted in challenging transition experiences.

In this regard research into the transition from primary school to secondary school promotes the significance of action and context, although much of this research does

not address or investigate the contextual changes in practice in which children and young people's relationships and learning are situated, and where transition that is ultimately successful and psychologically fulfilling occurs.

Research that investigates transition from primary school to secondary school comprises either largely quantitative methodologies, notably questionnaires, where challenges associated with transition are considered as a normative problem that is closely linked to adolescent instability and inadequacy. Assumptions related to child development, depression and adolescence are, in O'Donnell and Tobbell's (2007) view, over-represented. International research perspectives are useful to refer to from France by Bourcet (1998) and similarly by Naughton (1997) in Ireland considered coping mechanisms adopted by adolescents in a new school context following transition. In broad terms both researchers acknowledge the value of investigating transition during differing stages of life. During the move from primary school to secondary school, age related biological norms and development are highlighted as reasons for difficulty. The current study extends the scope of the research corpus by looking at transition post 16 amongst a small but potentially vulnerable group of young people.

In contrast other research outlines discontinuities emanating from processes of transition from primary to secondary school. In this regard it is possible to identify curriculum shifts, shifts to restricted teaching approaches in secondary school, from multiple and various strategies in primary settings and environment related discontinuities involving changing classrooms, lack of recreational space and the like; three discontinuities noted by Tobbell (2005), Galton & Pell (2002) and Pointon (2000). The current study extends the scope of research by considering similar factors found to be relevant for young people who have left school.

It would be seductive as well as overly simplistic to conceptualise transition as a problem; rather it can be viewed as a stage or fact of peoples lived experience. It is perhaps a reductionist approach to attribute a purely developmental explanation, such as being adolescent, to a particular type of transition and a different perspective might be to instead investigate the nature of the kind of discontinuities noted, and to consider why these can impact on a person's performance. The current study has demonstrated relevant and meaningful intentions to address the challenging transition experiences of a group of visually impaired young people; their respective discontinuities and outcomes.

Simplistically it would seem that secondary schools pick up the mantle of educating children when and where the primary school stops, building on the curriculum incrementally. However, in reality the context of where and how knowledge is presented acts to construct the learning that occurs; the importance of context in transition related research cannot be overstated. Exploring how this process continues for young people after leaving school offers an extension of the corpus, particularly as it affects visually impaired young people.

### **Transition beyond Compulsory Education**

In considering transition to university there is a relative dearth of research that is in descriptive terms rich and sets out to offer insight into the lived experience. It is interesting to note that much of the related research examining the social and academic aspects of transition are explored separately. It is also important to recognise that the homogeneity of the student population has increased in terms of students attending from wider socio-economic contexts and with adults returning to

education adding to the population of younger people moving from secondary settings to university.

Research by Rhodes et al. (2002, looking at study skills, and Walker et al. (2004), investigating students' feelings of alienation, consider some of the practical barriers and challenges students encounter in the transition to university. Pedagogy was the focus of research by Macaro et al. (2004) who looked at how students coped with differing approaches to language learning between state schools and university in terms of the development of coping strategies and motivation. Cassidy et al. (2001) considered identity change amongst students during a longitudinal study straddling 6<sup>th</sup> form and university while Walker et al. (2004) and Rhodes et al. (2002) considered the effectiveness of support systems for students engaged in transition from either secondary schools or further education colleges to university. The current research and its focus on transition, identity and feelings of independence amongst a group of visually impaired young people who have experienced challenge following leaving compulsory education provides further important insight into processes of transition.

Research by Walker et al. (2004), for example, considers in depth the experiences of different groups of students who have encountered transition to university and the common themes identified in research findings that may lead to positive experiences at university. The appropriateness of students' academic preparation in terms of being able to study independently, possessing adequate study skills to ease the process of transition and managing any perceived dissonance between students' own learning styles and that which is promoted at university are important areas of focus. The current research elaborates on these themes as they have affected the transition journeys of visually impaired young people who have left compulsory

education and experienced a range of study-skill related difficulties some of which have been related to their visual needs whilst others relate more to apparently inadequate self-advocacy skills and resilience when faced with adversity.

The research cited relating to transition to university, in a similar vein to research considered in relation to transition to school and between primary and secondary school, is useful in furnishing us with an opportunity to review the often rich subjectively-based experiences of people engaged in transition processes. However, an examination of the psychological processes that relate to transition is less evident in the literature apart from studies that have investigated one type of adult students' experience through transition, noted by Tobbell et al. (2005) and Walker et al. (2004), for example. The development of theoretical frameworks offer explanations for some students experiencing alienation due to factors such as lack of preparedness for university study, socio-economic background, disability and race that affect the development of a sense of belonging, commitment and integration into both the social and academic systems of the university. The current study utilises sociocultural theory to explore and account for the transition journey of a small group of visually impaired young people experiencing discontinuities following their departure from compulsory education

### **Transition – Developing a Theoretical Framework**

However, although the research cited above and included in this study's literature review highlights individuals' subjective experiences, a framework that proposes a way of appreciating and reviewing the psychological processes that students experience is lacking; what psychological processes underpin the development of, for example, a sense of belonging or indeed alienation towards a further education

placement or a training placement as a transition point? Being able to analyse experience related to transition can lead to the design and evaluation of interventions to support successful transition for wide ranging groups within the student population generally and more specifically to visually impaired young people, given the focus of the current study. Viewing transition through a socio-cultural lens can address Tobbell's (2007) concerns.

I acknowledge the positive attributes of ecological theory in offering a structure by which the various personal and more politicised influences can affect the transition process beyond compulsory education into further education, training and employment contexts but consider that the theory lacks sufficient insight to encompass and comprehend the personal characteristics of the student that are shaped following exposure to the systems which encompass transition. Instead the communities of practice perspective (Lave et al. 1991) and its focus on practice and participation in particular in relation to learning and transition is likely to be more relevant in this context.

As suggested earlier in the review of literature, communities of practice (Lave et al. 1991) as a theory of learning has utility as a means of analysing and gaining an insight into transition because the theoretical position is adopted that views engagement in social practice as the overarching process by which people learn and therefore acquire and develop an identity. In this context it is the informal communities of practice that should be exposed to analysis, as opposed to either the individual student or the social institution on an individual level. Theoretically, communities of practice can lead to the systematic exploration of notions of community, social practice, meaning and identity and where these issues coalesce. This then provides a framework for considering how learning as a process of social

participation occurs and is applicable to developing a deeper understanding of transition.

Applying the communities of practice model can lead to a more coherent view of transition and how students from a post compulsory education context, for example, where they have been full and engaged participants and experienced in the practices of that context, can on moving to further education, training or employment become peripheral participants, with no experience of their new community. The impact on the identity of the students is significant; they are unaware of what they need to do and they lack the understanding to define themselves because they lack opportunities to the practices which will develop their new community and thereby themselves as participants in the community.

Such a process inevitably can result in the threat of young people becoming disengaged, isolated and NEET. In terms of this study's findings identity is viewed as a diffuse notion in that within situations where the student is familiar, has a history, involvement and continuity it is not certain that there is a naturally occurring lack of assurance. Unexpected or novel educational contexts then suggest or prompt novel ways of doing and functioning as a person, and in so doing reinforces a perception that previous knowledge may therefore be of little practical use due to a lack of continuity of experience.

This idea of identity as a distributed phenomenon is critical to the development of our knowledge of transition. Rejecting research that views transition as bound to lead to negative challenges for people and which seeks to separate knowledge from context, this study's findings promotes a view of acceptance that students will be unable to participate fully in their new academic, training or employment context and

that this should be viewed as a feature of learning. From this perspective people involved in transition to novel contexts should be perceived as needing time to comprehend and to negotiate the skills required to operate within these new settings. The simplistic notion that transferring behaviours and skills from previous contexts, such as secondary school, is open to criticism as it is likely that these behaviours and skills may be inappropriate. Instead people engaged in transition can with the right level and form of support review how their current skills sets can be employed and thereby explore how this knowledge and skills can be shaped and honed by and within the new community, resulting in a change of trajectory for the participants. The findings of the current study highlighting, in some instances, poorly developed skills linked to the additional core curriculum and soft skills for visually impaired young people such as habilitation, self-advocacy, solution-focused problem solving skills and the like (Douglas et al., 2014) are of particular relevance in this context.

Transition experienced by students should therefore be approached more holistically because cognition is primarily a social, distributed entity and merely measuring performance or attitude is not sufficient. Incorporating the practices which act to influence the communities which develop the student's life require research and analysis.

Participation in the transition process is more than being available or present in a context as the reported experiences of the participants in this study demonstrate; mutuality is key in the sense that this represents involvement in those tasks and activities that presume mutual recognition of other people. Participation also leads to transformation in the context of the individual person and the community of practice in which that participation occurs. Mutuality positions student identity as of critical significance, of how they participate (if indeed they do) and how they respond to

practices in their new context which is crucial in interpreting that nature of individual transition.

#### **4.4.3 Identity and Transition**

This study's findings signal that gaining an appreciation of transition is therefore closely linked to identity and its path or trajectory in the new community of practice.

In addition, this study's findings support Wenger (1998) promotion of the view that:

1. Identity is fundamentally temporal
2. The work of identity is ongoing
3. Because it is constructed in social contexts, the temporality of identity is more complex than a linear notion of time
4. Identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories (p.154)

From such a theoretical position then identity does not possess characteristics that suggest stability or maintaining static features.

In considering the experiences of students in transition Wenger suggests differing types of trajectories which contribute to a shaping of experience. The following trajectories are outlined:

- Peripheral – leading to identity change but not full participation
- Inbound – initially peripheral participation, with ultimately the aim of full participation

- Insider – full participation is evident but there can be changes in practice, meaning and therefore identity
- Boundary – these encompass more than one community of practice, with evident relationships between them
- Outbound – participation is enabled in a future community of practice

It is these differing trajectories, outlined in the individual transition accounts of participants in the current study where discontinuity is so evident, that affect participation and thus learning. It could be hypothesised, for example, that where a student engages in peripheral participation only, poor experience of education may result. Alternatively, such a level of participation may in fact become very influential to a person's identity as it may lead to an important, life-changing event. Students may be viewed as identifying with differing trajectories that can impact on their levels of participation with the institutions community of practice.

In this regard identity can, alongside a function of an individual's contextual and historical characteristics, be an indication of ambition; the notion of participation and trajectory noted above necessitates changes in understanding, building new relationships and negotiation of meaning and one's identity. This study's findings suggest that to comprehend transition the focus needs to be directed towards the student, their histories and ambitions, alongside the new community, its history and ambitions. Transition is therefore mediated by these factors.

In acknowledging that participation forms the foundation for the development of a person's identity and that this has a significant influence on life trajectories and learning, there should also be recognition that the process of participation is

influenced by multiple factors as outlined in both sociocultural and ecological systems theory.

The multiple levels of the ecological system reflect relationships and affective systems which interact unpredictably and in a non-linear manner. Fundamentally participation develops and is influenced within such a context and it is participation that should be recognised as an ontological imperative, with these processes that influence it being critical to understanding the psychology of transition.

The following chapter, the Conclusion, will set out to identify the implications of the findings in terms of addressing the research aims and questions. Conclusions relating to the substantive, theoretical and methodological aims, including an evaluation of the research design and the degree to which the theoretical framework and methods supported this will also be outlined.

Limitations of the study will be discussed, as will new questions that arise as a result of this research.

In addition implications of the overall findings in addressing the research questions and recommendations for future professional practice of educational psychologist's will be considered.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of this study was to use sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework to explore the transition experiences of visually impaired young people who had completed compulsory education in an attempt to address an identified gap in research in this area. Whilst there is a reasonable research evidence base concerning the experiences of visually impaired young people during their compulsory education (Morris et al., 2008; Hewett et al., 2010) and in terms of their subsequent employment prospects and experiences (Douglas et al., 2006; Douglas et al., 2009), a paucity of evidence has examined the transitions between these two elements of the lived experience of these young people, including their perceptions of their levels of independence and self-identity during transition. This research has been set within a social and political context of high levels of unemployment amongst young people in the United Kingdom and even higher levels of unemployment amongst young people with disabilities and specifically those who are visually impaired, as noted by Douglas et al. (2009) and more recently Douglas et al. (2014).

This concluding chapter will re-consider the research aims and questions formulated following the review of literature and discuss how the findings relate to socio-cultural theory.

Reflections on the chosen methodology will then be outlined, including consideration of the design, sample, consent, data analysis, validity and reliability and researcher reflexivity.

More general limitations of the study will also be considered, followed by a discussion of implications for the professional practice of practitioners working with visually impaired young people in light of the newly revised SEND Code of Practice (2014) and possible directions for future related research.

## **5.2 Reviewing the Research Aims and Questions**

After conducting a literature review and following analysis of sociocultural theory relating to transition from compulsory education to other destinations amongst visually impaired young people, two research aims and three research questions were formulated.

The aims of this research and choice of research questions mirror the epistemological and theoretical position that this study embraces. The main emphasis of this study was to investigate the views of visually impaired young people who have experienced challenging transitions from compulsory education. From this quite expansive view further queries and matters for potential investigation are revealed from this perspective due to the varied and multiple related settings within education, training and employment contexts experienced by participants, their own individual needs and characteristics, systemic and organisational structures and how these interact with wider communities within which they are embedded.

### **5.2.1 Research Question 1:**

**How do visually impaired young people view the process of transition from compulsory education into other settings in terms of their feelings of independence and self-identity?**

Participants revealed a range of differing experiences with regard to their experiences of transition from compulsory education in terms of their feelings of independence and identity. The three superordinate or overarching themes that were identified from analysis of interview data were related to an apparent continuum of feelings of dependency on others to feelings of independence, responses to personal and study-based challenges and the participants' perceptions of the availability and influence of support systems during their transition-related experiences. The majority of the participants experienced challenging transitions as a result of apparent over-dependency on others, generally ineffective or poorly developed self-advocacy, solution-focused and problem –solving strategies and a general lack of co-ordinated and individualised support systems to address transition related difficulties in a timely fashion.

In considering the participants' views of their transitions-based experiences, Crafter & Maunder's (2012) research that suggests that transitions take different forms and have some impact or consequence on the individual and their external environment and can therefore be viewed as consequential is relevant. Beach studied transition as consequential in this respect, promoting the idea of the transition of knowledge from one setting to another. Beach (1999) questioned whether the skills individuals learn within an educational setting transfer to their new context of employment, arguing that transitions are consequential in terms of the impact they have on the individual and the social context they inhabit. Beach (1999) describes a consequential transition as a "conscious reflective struggle to reconstruct knowledge, skills and identity in ways that are consequential to the individual becoming someone or something new" (p.30). This process has evidently proved challenging to

participants discussed in this study as evidenced by their experience of discontinuity in sometimes multiple contexts after leaving compulsory education.

### **5.2.2 Research Question 2:**

**What do visually impaired young people who have left compulsory education say about factors affecting transition in terms of preparation for their life experiences to date, particularly with regard to potential education, employment and training pathways following leaving school?**

Research participants reported a variety of experiences that appear to have impacted on their preparation for potential education, employment and training pathways following leaving school. These related to their access to tuition and on-going support to develop independent living skills whilst they were in school and to the present day, their knowledge of where to seek advice relevant to their own needs and being able to access guidance and mentoring to maintain positive experiences and avoid disruption to placements at college, training contexts and employment. Having access to work experience and to a relevant additional core curriculum when attending school is shown to be an issue of significance for some participants.

Beach (1999) and Wenger (1998) view transition through a sociocultural framework where an individual's move through a period of transition may be perceived as a process of reconstruction, change and adaptation. In this sense, transitions can often be a struggle in terms of re-learning and re-adapting skills and knowledge and adapting these in a new context. There is also the potential for transition in this sense to alter an individual's sense of self, as considered by Beach (1999). It is conceivable that for visually impaired young people this threat to or alteration of sense of self may be the most difficult aspect to deal with during the transition from education to employment.

Research that has looked into periods of transition for visually impaired young people suggests that developing and maintaining a positive self-image alongside self-determination are two key components towards creating resilience during transition. Wong (2004) found that visually impaired students expressed how they felt they needed to “try that bit harder and prove yourself that bit more to try to get an edge over your competitors” during periods of transition (Wong, 2004, p.41).

### **5.2.3 Research Question 3:**

**What do psychological theories relating to transition, identity and independence tell us about how visually impaired young people face challenges presented by post 16 transitions from compulsory education into other settings?**

The findings revealed in this study suggest that theories that promote the importance of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) are relevant in this regard. Crafter and Maunder (2012) view this framework as useful in that it advocates placing the learner at the centre of the transition process whilst also recognizing the role of communities, practices, meanings and identities in terms of the contexts within which we exist, what we are doing, how we make sense of our actions, our sense of belonging and the effects this has on who we are. The significance of social learning theory is emphasised in this respect in that social participation within a ‘community’ context is considered of prime importance for learning to take place; a developing sense of identity through interacting with members of a shared community and learning shared practices is postulated. The individual is viewed as developing an identity as a competent member of a group, gaining a sense of belonging within an optimum context. The participants in this study have struggled in terms of social participation in post compulsory school contexts that they have found themselves

part of, or not as the case may be. They have struggled to be independent and to be members of a shared community.

### **5.3 Reflections on the Methodology**

#### **5.3.1 Design**

##### **Reflective Overview**

This research study can claim to have value as the review of literature chapter suggests a dearth of research examining the transitions of visually impaired young people during the period when they have left compulsory education and subsequently entered the employment context.

This section provides reflections on the research process and the methodology used to address the research aims and research questions.

It is important to note that the methods used in collecting and analysing the data allowed the research questions to be developed and addressed in relation to this area of enquiry. The process of analysis that was applied to the data revealed a story which is presented within and across the themes, highlighting a range of pertinent issues in regard to post-16 transition, planning and support experiences of visually impaired young people. In Chapter 4, these key findings were presented and discussed in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 2, and further interpreted within the integrating socio-cultural conceptual framework.

In reflecting on this research study and some of its limitations the chosen design merits scrutiny.

## Case Study Design

A case study design framework has been used in this research project, investigating the transitions- based experiences of a small group of visually impaired young people who have left compulsory education. Yin (2009) notes that the “case-study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated” (p.11). I was interested in the lived experiences of participants and had no wish to manipulate or alter their behaviours. Certainly contemporary events were being examined in this research study and it is possible that as a result of this research and similar studies outcomes for visually impaired young people might be changed by changed professional practice in the future, enabling improved support structures to be explored and developed to reduce the challenge of transition experienced by this group of young people.

As Thomas (2009) comments, case-studies can be criticised by researchers because they can be claimed to be poorly defined, be characterised by limited rigour and be liable to contain bias. Such a view in the context of the present study can be negated as at least part of this criticism of case-studies may be perceived as a strength because, as Thomas (2011) states, they can provide uniqueness, with the context of the phenomena itself being unique.

The most frequently assigned criticism of case study design is that they do not contribute to knowledge scientifically because research findings are generalised to other settings other than the case being explored. Flybvjerg (2006) rejects this criticism;

“One can often generalise on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as a supplement or alternative to

other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas “the force of example” is underestimated” (p.228).

A researcher needs to identify and recognise the limitations of the chosen design, methods and their application in their research. The decision to conduct a pilot interview with a young person without a visual impairment was justified in that it supported my efforts to promote the credibility and validity of the narratives elicited from the participant young people through the semi-structured interview process. However, I was aware that the young people had additional needs which may have influenced their communicative capacities to varying degrees in that they were experiencing challenging post compulsory education transition journeys and were uncertain as to their future transition-related planning.

### **Interviewing Young People**

In this respect it is important that researchers working with visually impaired young people recognise the importance of modifying interview techniques in order to elicit young people’s views and perspectives with fidelity and the maximum level of detail that is feasible. Researchers such as Lewis (2009) and Lewis and Porter (2007) have identified the ways in which increased validity and reliability of accounts elicited from young people with additional needs can be achieved. Lewis (2009) noted the importance of employing interview techniques in such contexts that include permitting and encouraging “don’t know” responses and requests for clarification.

Evidence from research by Lewis and Porter (2007) indicates that encouraging young people to explicitly state that they do not know the “answer” or do not understand a question is valuable, especially when exploring more abstract concepts; emphasising that the interviewer him/ herself does not know the answers

to the questions posed, in order to counter the young person's assumption that the adult knows the answer; use of statements requiring comparisons, instead of questions - using statements to elicit responses rather than direct questions has been shown to be valuable. In terms of the use of repeat questions research suggests (Lewis, 2009) that there can be value in repeating the focus of an open question in gaining a full and accurate response from young people. In such circumstances it is nevertheless important to avoid any suggestion in the young person's perceptions that their earlier responses were at all unsatisfactory.

Successive prompting during interviews should be avoided as this technique may lead to inaccurate information being given if the young person feels that they need to "fill in" the details, as there is the possibility that the interviewee may misinterpret this as a desire for additional or alternative information.

The interviewer should also be prepared and willing to accept a young person's right to silence in response to an interview question. It is clearly desirable to respect the fact that in some situations young people may decide that they do not wish to express their views. In this respect, Lewis and Porter (2007) do note that silence in response to an interview question "gives a message of its own that we should hear" (p.230).

In this study I was able to demonstrate some of the methods that have been used by other researchers eliciting the views of young people with special educational needs. During the interview process some of the techniques described by Lewis (2009) such as encouraging young people to seek clarification and reassuring them that there was not any prescribed correct answer were adopted.

### **5.3.2 Sample**

Silverman (2000) noted that the methods used within qualitative research often reflect or mirror a view that social experiences can be most appropriately and effectively accessed via research characterised by being small in scale and designed to generate a richer and more in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

In following the philosophy of IPA, purposive sampling was employed thereby enabling insight into the lived experience of a group of visually impaired young people who have experienced transition from compulsory education and met challenges and difficulty, forming a generally homogeneous sample, as outlined and promoted by Smith et al. (2009). The question of establishing homogeneity within such a sample is, however, problematic because differences between participants is inevitable and surely desirable, although the proposal stated by Smith et al. (2009) that research participants should “represent a perspective rather than a population” (p.49) is adhered to in this investigation. Indeed the participants have characteristics that are in common; they are visually impaired young people who have left compulsory education and each has experienced some degree of challenge during the transition process from school or further education to the next stage of their individual journeys. In these regards the sample has a sufficient degree of homogeneity that meets this particular methodological requirement.

### **5.3.3 Consent**

In order to achieve ethical veracity, alongside establishing a trusting association with participants achieving their informed consent was of critical importance. The process

of achieving consent needs to engender mutual trust and confidence and be an open process that promotes transparency between researcher and participant. Guidelines endorsed by BERA (2004) that state:

“voluntary informed consent is the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway” (p.6)

were adopted in this study.

An equally important ethical consideration was that of anonymity and confidentiality; participants were notified during their recruitment that data gathered from interviews with them would be handled with the utmost care and their privacy, anonymity and confidentiality was to be assured.

Through these means I aimed to provide a platform for participants to contribute to an authentic and open discourse.

Each participant will be provided with a summary of the completed research project and receive details of how to access the research document online on its completion.

#### **5.3.4 Data Analysis**

As Barker et al. (2002) comments, IPA offers the researcher “a systematic and practical approach to analysing phenomenological data” (p.81). It is an approach that can illuminate unique points of view, perspectives, common topics and difference in people’s premises. The method offered by IPA is employed by psychologists due to its clarity of approach to qualitative research, its structure and comprehensible procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Criticism of IPA has emanated from proponents of thematic analysis; in this respect it has been labelled as being too dependent upon structure and inflexible when analysing data. The outline and characteristics of the stage by stage analytical process adapted from Smith et al. (2010, p.82) in order to analyse the data derived from semi-structured interviews, detailed at the beginning of Chapter 4 counters such a view.

In the context of this research study I consider IPA to offer a structure that benefitted the process as it afforded a replicable approach that promoted accountability when analysing data, as well as challenging a view that thematic analysis and similar procedures can present as being capable of addressing all data analysis needs and can thereby be perceived as being unrealistic.

As referred to earlier, a variety of approaches exist under the term IPA that form a broad continuum from the interpretive to the descriptive, as well as the individually orientated to the shared perspective. For this research study the analytical step by step process outlined by Smith et al. (2009) that comprises transcription, reading and re-reading, initial noting, development of emergent themes, searching for connections across themes, moving to the next case and then looking for patterns across cases was utilised.

### **5.3.5 Validity and Reliability**

#### **Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Studies**

Given the critique offered of data collection and data analysis approaches within IPA outlined in the Methodology chapter and in this concluding chapter, it is also important to comment on and discuss how matters relating to validity and reliability

may affect qualitative research studies. In the context of qualitative research approaches, validity and reliability lose their positivist, scientific emphases and are instead viewed as being related to processes by which researchers are absorbed in an interpretive sense in the developmental course of the research as opposed to seeking both neutrally and objectively to witness events.

Reliability in the context of qualitative studies may never be fully secured because of the inherent nature and features of this approach to research. However, achieving reliability within qualitative approaches can be and were given impetus by multiple analysis of audio recorded interviews through repeated listening, leading to accurate transcription and real proximity to the data. This approach with illustrations of how data analysis of raw data was addressed can be another device by which reliability can be enhanced.

Commenting on the potential difficulties of safeguarding validity in qualitative research contexts, Smith et al. (2009) imply that from a constructionist standpoint, central tenets concerning validity can be determined by how individual people interpret validity in the context under discussion. It is important to acknowledge that validity is hard to establish before the research is embarked upon because of its uncertain and inductive characteristics. The nature of qualitative research dictates that researcher bias and effects are recognised, taken account of and are viewed as an inherent part of the process. Therefore, it is appropriate to view validity in qualitative research contexts as fluid in nature and influenced by the journey experienced by the research process. In this regard, Coolican (2004) notes that qualitative approaches can be seen as valid as long as they establish and maintain integrity and provide a truthful explanation of people's experience. In addition validity is able to be established when research findings are deduced with consistency and

with even-handedness, as well as when another researcher, after the completion of further analysis, arrives at similar assumptions and deductions.

I acknowledge that significant issues relate to establishing and maintaining validity in qualitative research studies that encompass factors such as seeking descriptive validity by including verbatim transcriptions, co-checking of gathered data and interpretations, including attention to interpretive validity by consulting with participants, contextualising findings with regard to existing literature in order to triangulate as well as identifying theoretical validity through theory generation. The perceptions of the researcher and how the research process has impacted upon such views should also be carefully noted in order to maintain validity. I believe that this has been achieved in this study.

### **Validity, Reliability and IPA**

Smith et al. (2009) note that validity and reliability are pivotal to IPA, with the processes described above being adhered to carefully within this approach. As discussed by Smith and Osborn (2007), interpretive research will invariably attract some apprehension concerning the double hermeneutic where the researcher interprets the participants' interpretation of events founded in lived experience. Clearly such a context can lead to possible misinterpretation and unclear perceptions that relate to the validity of qualitative studies in general. In this respect it is noteworthy that IPA appreciates that the context for research is an essentially dynamic one, with the researcher acknowledged as having a key part to play; building rapport between researcher and participant, as well as understanding the context of the research is essential to its overall success and effectiveness. It is also noteworthy that IPA recognises that the interpretation of data may be very

subjective, leading to interpretations that are well-evidenced, founded as well as grounded in raw data.

Smith et al. (2009) elaborate on the concerns relating to reliability and validity when using IPA by maintaining that within this approach standardised data collection processes are adhered to in the main, and by noting that careful and in-depth documenting, transcription, interpretation and the creation of inter-rater reliability occurs to assure coherence and transparency of the research.

In this study I chose to involve a peer researcher to analyse one data set in order to engage in a process of triangulation to control for inherent bias within the research and to confirm valid themes, issues of concern raised by Golafshani (2003). However, criticism can be levelled at such a process if it claims to enhance reliability and validity due to the inductive nature of the research approach, alongside the level of absorption or immersion with the text the researcher is likely to be experiencing.

Patton (2002) commented that the validity of research is related to the researcher's rigour in terms of data collection and subsequent analysis, the commitment to detail in sampling, attention to the interview process and the profundity of analysis. In general terms a research projects' validity will be ascertained on the basis of its impact and what it reveals. I believe that these factors were addressed to a satisfactory degree during this research study.

The methods employed in this study have enabled me to illuminate the reported experiences and perspectives of a small group of visually impaired young people within a given context. The process of IPA supported exploration of these perspectives in a thorough and systematic way relevant to the research questions.

### **5.3.6 Researcher Reflexivity**

During the process of this research project I have remained committed to careful self- reflection and analysis in terms of the role I have taken in the development and evolution of the gathering of data and the analysis thereof. These measures are of importance in terms of acknowledging, containing and alleviating potential bias emanating from my own subjective experiences.

#### **My Identity as Researcher**

It should again be acknowledged that my own professional and personal views, values and attitudes as a former specialist teacher of visually impaired children and young people and as an educational psychologist undertaking research with visually impaired young people, support and reinforce the research project that is in general empathetic towards visually impaired people who have faced challenging transitions from compulsory education and the consequences of this.

During the collection of data process I recognise that I wanted to foster a positive relationship and rapport with the participants who were interviewed. This, on reflection, may have led to interviews that were perhaps not as challenging as they might have been or that might not have seen me confronting the participants in response to their stated views or to certain issues that may have appeared controversial.

I also recognise that in my role I was different from participants in a number of significant ways; I am not visually impaired, I have not experienced the level of uncertainty that the project participants have in terms of transition from compulsory education and I might be perceived as being in a position of some professional

authority. I also acknowledge that I was representing the Transitions Project research team and the University of Birmingham. These factors in combination acted as a limitation in some respects with regard to the development of the interviews; how far questions could be pursued and to what extent areas of concern could be explored.

The value of the pilot interview was confirmed as the initial experiences derived from this process did assist me to feel relatively confident in conducting the first interview. However, it was also the case that my interview technique, in my own opinion at least, did improve after each interview.

It was evident that the participants varied in terms of their apparent reaction to the interviewer and the interviews themselves; some appeared relatively unperturbed and engaged in the process, seemingly forming a positive relationship with the interviewer. On the other hand other participants were less relaxed and formed a less positive dynamic with the interviewer. This, I acknowledge, was inevitable in such a research context. In response to apparently less relaxed interview contexts, I did attempt to modify or adjust my approach to the context and to the interviewee. Nevertheless this can prove to be a challenging scenario where people are not known to one another and where the presence of possible power discrepancies can exert influence.

Throughout the research project process I made concerted efforts to exclude my own values and belief systems. This may have given an impression to some of the participants that I held views that were negative about school based support systems in secondary school and that as a consequence I perceived that participants were

eager on occasions to provide an affirmative view of the support they received in secondary school prior to their transition experiences.

Nevertheless I concede that my own beliefs may have appeared during the course of each interview, with the recognition that this could have served to influence the perceptions of secondary school support structures donated by the participants.

### **Data Analysis – Reflections on the Process**

In reflecting on the process of data interpretation, as noted in the Methodology chapter, Smith et al. (2009) provided a guide to the data analysis approach that was adopted. I experienced the complexities and intricacies of this process and committed to listening to interview transcripts on multiple occasions in order to gain as comprehensive an understanding of the nature of what participants said, and crucially to develop more than a subjective interpretation of the text. I found this to be a challenging task and acknowledge that my interpretations will reveal some degree of possible bias, as well as reflecting elements of my thoughts and preconceived notions of research findings and outcomes.

In this respect I anticipated that the research would have revealed positive views expressed by participants about the way they had been prepared for transition from compulsory education and acknowledge that I may have been primed or attuned to discovering this.

I also recognise difficulty in analysing each transcript without almost comparing and contrasting them with each other, inviting the potential threat of detecting recognizable perceptions founded on anticipated views. Through careful and systematic reading, re-reading and cross referencing that formed an essential part of

the iterative process this, it is hoped, served to mitigate for this, leading me to maintain some confidence that trends and patterns across the interview transcriptions can be validated.

#### **5.4 General Limitations of this Study**

##### **Defending the Findings**

If this research study is reflected upon utilising a social constructionist paradigm, matters that pertain to reliability and validity may not be judged as essential indicators of whether or not a case study lacks rigour, as noted by Thomas (2009).

Burr (2003) suggests:

“Social constructionist research is not about identifying objective facts or making truth claims. These can be no final description of the world, and reality may be inaccessible or inseparable from our discourse about it; all knowledge is provisional and contestable, and accounts are local and historically/ culturally specific. The concepts of reliability and validity, as they are normally understood, are therefore inappropriate for judging the quality of social constructionist work” (p.158).

It would be inappropriate in this context to consider the application to this research of limitations with an origin in a positivist paradigm. However, I was aware that defending the data analysis was problematic in this regard and used principles and criteria promoted by Burr (2003), leading to the inclusion of detailed and thorough information outlining how the data analysis was achieved (see section 4.1), as well as including an exemplar of the analysis, suggested by Wood and Kroger (2000), thereby permitting readers to see how the analysis was performed and leading to enhanced rigour of the study as a whole (see Appendix 6).

With specific regard to data analysis, the data derived from the interviews was analysed using IPA and I acknowledge that any previous experience of engaging in research or work in the area under investigation and overall understanding and knowledge of the research context may as a consequence lead to bias (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To limit the potential for bias in the study, a peer researcher assisted in the seeking and identification of emergent themes, sub-themes and overarching themes involving one of the transcribed interviews from the data set as a whole.

An additional limitation was avoided by the involvement of a peer researcher as part of the cross referencing procedure that occurred utilising the pilot study interview. This proved to be a helpful measure within the reflexive process because it invited me to consider alternative approaches to interpret the data and to recognise different issues to consider and reflect upon.

This process in my view has led to the reinforcement of the research and could have in combination with the participants feedback post hoc may have led to the interpretations reflecting more accurately what was said during the interviews.

I acknowledge the value of employing a peer researcher for the entirety of the data analysis process with regard to reducing researcher bias but limited resources made this impractical. A different approach considered to minimise potential researcher bias was the use of NVivo. However, on reflection I considered that such a software programme would not be able to note the complex subtleties of participant views expressed in interview contexts and would have led to me being denied access to significant knowledge sources through independent data analysis.

## **Involving Participants Post Hoc**

An important further limitation of this research was that participants were not provided with an opportunity to fully investigate the analysis of data and offer their own opinions on it which, as noted by Pring (2004) would add to its validity.

This study's methodology, findings and interpretations should be reflected upon carefully in relation to a range of additional significant and notable limitations. There is some degree of agreement with the views of Smith et al. (2009) that applying IPA as a method of collecting data "invited participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences" (p.56). Indeed, this was an aim of this research study from the outset.

Given the concerns that may be raised regarding IPA and validity and reliability as outlined and largely countered by Smith et al. (2009), it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the inductive nature of the research method and the extent to which the researcher will be immersed within the text threatens reliability and validity. Therefore, this research could be further improved in this regard if after the analysis phase the participants had been consulted to consider and comment on my own interpretations.

In this respect it could have been possible in hindsight for me to have maintained contact with the participants after the interview and to have sought their views on his interpretations. However, drawbacks to such an approach exist. If the participants, for example, had concurred too eagerly with my interpretations this might signal that power imbalances between the participants and the interviewer were evident to the extent that the participants felt unable to confront my own interpretations, or that it

would be preferable to avoid raising contradictory views and instead to conceal their views.

It is important to acknowledge that the research findings provide a fleeting and incomplete view of the perceptions of a small group of visually impaired young people within particular settings on a certain day. The matter of the sample and whether it should or should not be viewed as representative could be viewed as limiting this study; purposive sampling occurred and no attempt has been made to present the sample as being typical or illustrative of the population of visually impaired young people transitioning from compulsory education into other destinations.

As observed previously I was concerned that the young people interviewed might have been influenced in their responses by the presence of power imbalances between themselves and me who had informed them I used to be a specialist teacher of visually impaired children. This may have resulted in participants responding in a way that they might have thought would cast the role of specialist or advisory teachers in a positive light, for example. Whilst acknowledging that power differentials outlined by the British Psychological Society (2009) could have been an important factor in this research, it is important to note that some participants were apparently more outspoken and willing to link their pre-transition, secondary school-based experiences with problematic transitions into employment, Sixth Form, further education and training routes. Following the interview with participant 3, the young person suggested that he might have been able to provide more detailed answers if questions had been forwarded prior to the interview. I had not considered adopting this approach because I anticipated that this may have resulted in obviously pre-

prepared, scripted answers which would ultimately have threatened the validity of the research findings.

### **The Suitability of Using IPA**

In referring back to the principal foundations of IPA, there is an emphasis on the idiographic as opposed to the nomothetic, with the implication that applying findings to a more general population is discouraged. This may be perceived as a limitation of this research project, although attention directed towards an idiographic approach upon a specific phenomenon does not solely relate to the study of the single individual because the phenomenological method has enhanced distinctiveness or is more nuanced and includes consideration of a world where people are engaged in relationships that influence them and their lived experience. This, as noted by Smith et al. (2009) permits a degree of generalisation in comprehending the way in which a person perceives themselves with respect to a particular aspect of their life, although at the same time it is important to recognise that IPA does not privilege the development of wide, overarching theories.

I was intent on pursuing the research study through a qualitative lens, with the intention of highlighting through the application of a psychological position that acknowledges the profound intricacies and complexity of human psychology. In adopting IPA I wanted to employ a research method that was intimately concerned with how participants experience and make sense of their world in relation to the phenomena in terms of being a young person with visual impairment who has experienced challenging transition from compulsory education.

The significance and primacy of reflexivity and its function in psychological research that privileges qualitative approaches should be recognised as of crucial significance

in the choice of IPA methodology in this research project. In this respect I established and sustained attention focused on my critical self-awareness, considering in so doing the effect of my own tenets, lived experiences, expectations and belief systems on the collection and interpretation of data. Coolican (2004) states that this can be a significant limitation relating to qualitative approaches. Alongside this needs to be acknowledged the possibility that even though I tried to adopt a reflexive stance to support validity and reliability, bias in data interpretation may have occurred.

In addition my professional background, with its emphasis on supporting the educational attainment and psychological well-being of visually impaired children and young people, had some degree of effect and served as a stimulus to become involved in this area of research. This leads to the conclusion that a quite different approach to addressing this research project, as well as an explanation of the outcomes could have been conceivable when reflected upon using an alternative perspective and focus.

### **Ontological Perspectives**

Three ontological perspectives that should be considered in researching transition, the empirical, or what is experienced, the actual, what happens but which is not experienced, and the real, actions that lead to developments that lead to tendencies, are outlined by Sayer (2000). Whilst it is unlikely that the range of research methodological or experimental designs would address these requirements, it could be an aspiration to encompass the empirical, actual and real in terms of analysing transition processes. In such a research context any data collection should set out to observe the practices that influence the communities of practice which students form

part of. In addition aspects of practice that both includes and excludes students should be considered, as well as analysing the contexts and levels that shape practices and learning relationships and their ultimate impact on students' educational experiences.

From a methodological perspective, it is likely that some quantitatively based approaches such a questionnaire would be limited in its application in such a context where seeking out richer experiences will be desirable. Although interviews provide a context for participants to meet the criteria for Sayer's (2000) empirical (that which is experienced) ontological perspective, the actual and the real layers would be less easily addressed.

Therefore, in designing a methodology that can develop knowledge and understanding of transition an ethnographic approach may be appropriate; the use of observation and interview implicit factors can become explicit, with the researcher being enabled to be embedded in the students' own contexts during the process of transition, thereby enabling there to be observation of meaning at multiple ecological levels.

In researching transition it is clearly important to view participation as an objective reality to the extent that it needs to be acknowledged as an ontological imperative. The research considered in this study is often descriptive and on occasions does not recognise this reality. From a theoretical perspective, privileging communities of practice and ecological theory, and methodologically, promoting ethnographic approaches, transition should be researched in order to gain an enhanced level of knowledge of the individual and social processes which form the foundation of participation and its influence on the lives of young people experiencing transition.

## **5.5 Implications for Professional Practice**

The research findings presented have a range of potential implications for the practice of involved professionals including teachers, lecturers, instructors and psychologist's in the context of transition from compulsory education to future pathways to education, employment and training for visually impaired young people and those with special or additional needs more generally.

During the development of this research study the new SEND Code of Practice (2014) has been implemented and its overall impact in the area of transition from school to different post-compulsory education remains unclear. Therefore in this section where implications for professional practice are considered a degree of speculation is afforded given the very recent implementation of the new SEND Code of Practice (2014).

The implementation of the SEND Code of Practice (2014) should provide professionals with the opportunity to engage in a facilitative role with young people with special educational needs who are leaving compulsory education and transitioning into other settings? It is conceivable that EPs, in particular, have a useful skills and knowledge base to support the process of transition for this group of young people through activities such as providing training to involved professionals, developing personalised or individualised working approaches, multi-agency and multi-professional joint working protocols and information sharing to address transition-related needs as highlighted in this study.

EPs and other professional's knowledge and experiences of working with young people with SEN who have left compulsory education and EPs experience of

working with post-16 settings needs to be considered. Anecdotally EPs may be able to draw on previous and current work experience of working with young people aged 16 or older with SEN, perhaps most notably in special school contexts where young people can be educated up to the age of 19 years and continue to be supported by a Statement of SEN, or indeed an EHC Plan. The range of roles and experiences EPs have had in such contexts include assessment of individual young people's needs, supporting children and young people in local authority care, undertaking examination access arrangement assessments, individual therapeutic work and assessment linked to transition from one context to another.

In considering potential opportunities for professionals to work with young people who have left compulsory education, it is notable that EPs have skills and knowledge that can support the emotional well-being of young people with SEN and disabilities, they can conduct holistic assessments, utilise assessment tools to assess needs and abilities and contribute to personalised learning approaches. Indeed in this regard the involvement of EPs with adolescents can be feasibly geared to the population of young people who have left compulsory education. The role of EPs is also likely to be helpful to other professionals who work with this group of young people because a good deal of rich psychologically-based information can be provided and can add to the development of interventions of many types.

In reflecting on the experience and knowledge base of EPs working with young people transitioning beyond compulsory education, contributing to multi-agency working and engaging with stakeholders involved in supporting this group of young people could be fruitful. Providing training, consultation and advice to other involved professionals and indeed to the young people directly would be an appropriate way of working in this context.

It is notable that the lack of involvement of many EPs and EP services in the area of transition from compulsory education for young people with SEN and disabilities, means it is possible that many colleges and training providers will be unaware of the multiple roles that EPs can perform and may need to be informed of the range of services that can be provided by EPs with this group of young people and their network of professional support.

In achieving an important aim of the SEND Code of Practice (2014), supporting young people to realise their ambitions during the process of transition from compulsory education into adulthood, all involved professionals can play a significant role in facilitating the appropriate sharing of important information that could support informed choice making around transitions-based options. Involved professionals, such as EPs could also be ideally placed to elicit the views of young people regarding their transition experiences and aspirations from a more independent perspective than more involved stakeholder professionals perhaps.

A training function for EPs and other professional colleagues working with stakeholders in developing inclusive practices and provision post-16 for young people with SEN and disabilities is an additional area of possible involvement in this context. The SEND Code of Practice (2014) promotes the view that post-16 educational and training provision needs to provide inclusive settings for young people who are involved in transition from compulsory education and in this respect EPs could play an important role in providing training to raise awareness of inclusive practice and of individual need. EPs could also play a facilitative or liaison role between settings to support transition arrangements, providing continuity in terms of staff awareness and training.

In considering how professional practice may need to be shaped to address needs outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (2014) with specific regard to transition post 16, it is important to be reminded that research by Stewart (2009) and Clarke et al. (2011) indicates that multi-professional collaboration, personalised 1:1 working and information sharing assist in the development of positive transition plans for young people with SEN and disabilities.

## **5.6 Future Research**

I consider that this research study has confirmed that there is a good deal to be gained from listening to the voice of visually impaired young people about their transition experiences. In addition, the findings of this project indicate further areas of research that could be considered.

It should be acknowledged that educational psychologists have limited experience of applying IPA as a tool in applied research settings. This research study suggests that developing further research projects using IPA with visually impaired young people concerning their experiences of transition would be beneficial in terms of enhancing the evidence base and to gain a wider and deeper appreciation of transitions-based experiences structured by a psychological framework.

The five participants who took part in the current research study offered a somewhat limited focus in that they were part of a wider group of young people who had been followed through the Transitions Project as a whole, the majority of whom had experienced less challenging transitions from compulsory education to further and higher education, training and employment. To be in a position to provide more generalized findings the present study would need to be developed substantially to

include more visually impaired young people at this particular transitional phase in their lives. For example, conducting a similar study with young people who had experienced far less challenging transition-based experiences would be illuminating.

Exploring the views of involved professionals, such as educational psychologist's, and families of visually impaired young people experiencing transitions from compulsory education using a similar approach to that adopted in the current study, would also provide different and possibly valuable perspectives.

This research and previous research demonstrates that visually impaired young people who have left compulsory education may experience significant challenges succeeding for variety of reasons. Using socio-cultural theory as a theoretical framework for analysis these challenges have been considered in depth and should be considered to have added to the corpus within research considering transitions and visually impaired young people.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Ethics Form – University of Birmingham**

**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**  
**APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW –**  
**REQUEST FOR AMENDMENTS**

**Who should use this form:**

- This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who are requesting ethical approval for amendments to research projects that have previously received ethical approval from the University of Birmingham.

**Please be aware that all new research projects undertaken by postgraduate research (PGR) students first registered as from 1st September 2008 will be subject to the University's Ethical Review Process. PGR students first registered before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008 should refer to their Department/School/College for further advice.**

- What constitutes an amendment?

Amendments requiring approval may include, but are not limited to, additions to the research protocol, study population, recruitment of participants, access to personal records, research instruments, or participant information and consent documentation. Amendments must be approved before they are implemented.

**NOTES:**

- Answers to questions must be entered in the space provided
- An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: [aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk). Please **do not** submit paper copies.
- If, in any section, you find that you have insufficient space, or you wish to supply additional material not specifically requested by the form, please submit it in a separate file, clearly marked and attached to the submission email.
- If you have any queries about the form, please address them to the [Research Ethics Team](#).

<b>UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM</b> <b>APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW -</b> <b>REQUEST FOR AMENDMENTS</b>	<i>OFFICE USE ONLY:</i>  Application No:  Date Received:
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**1. TITLE OF PROJECT**

Longitudinal Study of Transitions Experiences of Blind and Partially Sighted Young People

**2. APPROVAL DETAILS**

What is the Ethical Review Number (ERN) for the project?

**ERN\_09-880**

**3. THIS PROJECT IS:**

University of Birmingham Staff Research project

**4. INVESTIGATORS**

**a) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS OR SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)**

Name: Title / first name / family name	Dr Graeme Douglas
Highest qualification & position held:	PhD, Senior Research Fellow
School/Department	VICTAR, School of Education
Telephone:	[REDACTED]
Email address:	[REDACTED]
Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

**b) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF ANY CO-INVESTIGATORS OR CO-SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)**

Name Title / first name / family name	Mrs Rachel Hewett
Highest qualification & position held:	MA, Research Fellow
School/Department	VICTAR, School of Education
Telephone:	[REDACTED]
Email address:	[REDACTED]

**c) In the case of PGR student projects, please give details of the student**

Name of student:	Rachel Hewett	Student No:	[REDACTED]
Course of study:	PhD Education		
Principal supervisor:	Graeme Douglas		

Name of student:	Huw Williams	Student No:	[REDACTED]
Course of study:	PhD Educational Psychology		
Principal supervisor:	Jane Leadbetter		

5. **ESTIMATED START OF PROJECT**

Date:

**ESTIMATED END OF PROJECT**

Date:

**6. ORIGINAL APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW AND ANY SUBSEQUENT APPROVED AMENDMENTS:**

Please complete the table below for the original application and any subsequent amendments submitted

<b>Title and reference number of application or amendment</b>	<b>Key points of application and/or changes made by amendment (include: aims of study, participant details, how participants were recruited and methodology)</b>	<b>Ethical considerations arising from these key points (e.g. gaining consent, risks to participants and/or researcher, points raised by Ethical Review Committee during review)</b>	<b>How were the ethical considerations addressed?  (e.g. consent form, participant information, adhering to relevant procedures/clearance required)</b>
<i>Original application</i>	<p>Longitudinal study tracking 80 young people in school years 9 and 11 recruited through Visual Impairment Services in England Midlands and Wales. Intending to survey them at regular intervals along their transitional journey from GCSEs to further and higher education and employment.</p> <p>Application for the original research design, recruitment process, and various questionnaires and interview schedules.</p>	<p>Recruiting young people to take part in the project</p> <p>Storing of data</p>	<p>Consent form, information sheet</p>

<p><i>Subsequent amendment 1</i></p>	<p>Follow up interviews as part of the longitudinal study of their transition experience. At this stage the young people were in year 10 and year 12. Questions related to the courses they had gone on to take, exam results, work experience and support received at school/college and the use of social networking sites/mobile phones</p>	<p>If they and their parents/carers were still happy for them to take part in the project.</p> <p>Storing of data</p>	<p>Reminded participants they were free to withdraw from the project and to ask for any data collected on them to be removed.</p>
<p><i>Subsequent amendment 2</i></p>	<p>Follow up interviews as part of the longitudinal study of their transition experience. At this stage the young people were in year 11 and year 13. Questions related to the courses they had gone on to take, exam results, work experience and support received at school/college</p>	<p>If they and their parents/carers were still happy for them to take part in the project.</p> <p>Storing of data</p>	<p>Reminded participants they were free to withdraw from the project and to ask for any data collected on them to be removed.</p>
<p><i>Subsequent amendment 3</i></p>	<p>Follow up interviews as part of the longitudinal study of their transition experience. Interview focussed mainly on the concept of independence, and also looked at what the young people were planning to do next.</p>	<p>If they and their parents/carers were still happy for them to take part in the project.</p> <p>Storing of data/telephone recordings</p>	<p>Reminded participants they were free to withdraw from the project and to ask for any data collected on them to be removed. Given the option not to have interview recorded and informed that only the researcher would listen back to the recordings.</p>

<p><i>Subsequent amendment 4</i></p>	<p>Follow up interviews as part of the longitudinal study of their transition experience. Four different interview schedules according to their current pathway (i.e. whether in university, employment, further education or NEET).</p>	<p>If they and their parents/carers were still happy for them to take part in the project.</p> <p>Storing of data/telephone recordings</p>	<p>Reminded participants they were free to withdraw from the project and to ask for any data collected on them to be removed. Given the option not to have interview recorded and informed that only the researcher would listen back to the recordings.</p>
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## 7. **DETAILS OF PROPOSED NEW AMENDMENT**

Provide details of the proposed new amendment, and clearly and explicitly state how the proposed new amendment will differ from the details of the study as already approved (see Q6 above).

This is longitudinal study which involves repeated surveying of participants as they progress through 'educational transition'. We currently have approximately 70 young people involved in the study and have been regularly surveying them along their transition journeys. Within this longitudinal study, we are due to conduct case studies amongst some of the participants. These will involve:

1. Conducting a deeper investigation of the young persons' experience, particularly within their current setting. For those who are at university, this could include 'shadowing them' for the day, or those who are in work might be asked to complete a diary. We would negotiate with the young person as to how they would feel most comfortable.

2. Interviewing people around the young person (to be known as "associates") who have been important in either their transition until this point, or in their current setting. Examples could include: parents/carers; friends; QTVI; disability support office; colleague.

We are currently focussing on recruiting young people from amongst our existing cohort and their associates to take part in this new component of the study. Any interview schedules will be forwarded at a later date.

## 8. **JUSTIFICATION FOR PROPOSED NEW AMENDMENT**

This is a longitudinal study, and the design which was initially submitted to the ethics committee spoke of regular follow up interviews with those recruited into the project. This was accepted at the time, under the condition that we would update the ethics committee prior to starting each data capture.

See above for further details – I believe the amendment is actually in keeping with the original research proposal.

## 9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

What ethical considerations, if any, are raised by the proposed new amendment?

We will be asking the young people to take part in a new component of the overall project. As this will involve speaking to people other than themselves, we want to ensure that they fully understand what they are agreeing to. Therefore we have prepared a new information sheet and consent form which will explain what participation will involve.

Additionally, the associates will not have been involved in the project until this point, and therefore we will be providing them with an information sheet giving background to the project, an explanation of what we are asking them to do, and consent form for them to read and sign.

Both the young people and the associates will be given contact details of the research team to ask any additional questions or express any concerns, if they have them.

One anticipated ethical concern is ensuring that when we speak with the associates, we will not break any confidentiality. On the information sheet we explain that we will seek their permission before discussing anything with associates, and also establish if there is anything they not wish us to discuss.

The information sheets give a clear explanation of what the young people and their associates are consenting to, and they also explain how they are able to withdraw from the project if they wish.

Prior to starting any interviews, we will ask the young people and their associates if they are still happy to take part in the project, reminding them that they are free to withdraw whenever they wish. We will inform them that they do not have to answer any questions if they do not wish to do so.

Any data collected will be treated in the same way as before, with paper copies being kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic data kept on the secure university network, accessed by a password protected computer, in keeping with the University guidelines of storing data.

## 10. DECLARATION BY APPLICANTS

I make this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent.

I declare that:

- The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by University Code of Conduct for Research (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.

- I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.
- I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

**Signature of Principal Investigator/  
Project Supervisor:**

Graeme Douglas

**Date:**

11<sup>th</sup> September 2013

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Transitions Project – Information Sheet for Participants**

## **Transitions Project – Information Sheet**

The Transitions Project has now been running since 2010, and over that time we have been looking at the transition experience of around 80 blind and partially sighted young people. We are very grateful for the time that you have given us so far to take part in this research, and the valuable contribution that you have made to the project. You can find copies of our project reports and other outputs at the following website:

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/projects/transitions-study.aspx>

We are due shortly to start a new stage of work, where we will be conducting more focused interviews. We are approaching a number of the participants that we think have had particularly interesting transition experiences, to see if they would like to take part. This sheet provides you with more information about this extra work.

### **What's it about?**

We are looking for a number of young people to take part in a more detailed investigation of their 'transition' from school. This will help us get a better understanding of what you have experienced so far, any barriers you may have faced, or anything that may have particularly helped. It will also give you more of an opportunity to present your views of what you think has been good, and what needs changing.

We are also aware that many of your experiences will have been influenced by those around you, and to help us gain richer information, we are also interested in talking to some of the key people who have made a difference.

### **Who will you be speaking to?**

Most importantly we would like to speak to you. But we would also like to speak with a variety of other people ("associates") that have had an impact on you. Who we speak to will vary and depend on you, but may include: family; friends; lecturers; disability support officers; and work colleagues. We will discuss with you which people you think it would be useful for us to talk to about your transition from school. This may include people who have had an impact over a number of years, or someone who you have met recently. Be assured, we will not attempt to make contact with anyone unless give us permission.

### **What will I need to do to take part?**

We are flexible and will work in the way you feel most comfortable. One example of what we have in mind for those who are at university would be to visit you and find out what a typical day studying is like. Alternatively, an option might be to complete a short diary or telephone interview at the end of a typical day. Importantly, we can discuss what would suit you best before you make any commitment to take part.

### **Will you share my personal information with other people you interview?**

No – not without your permission. The main purpose of talking to other people is to get their ‘take’ about aspects of your transition from school that you think is important. We would take your advice on what was important to ask people and clarify with you what we would be asking. For example, you might suggest we discuss with a parent about some aspects of your school life, or to a disability officer about some adjustments which were negotiated at university. We could talk to these people in your presence if that suited you best.

### **How does this relate to the other project work?**

We will still be conducting both follow up interviews and more focused interviews with the entire group of participants. We hope you will still be involved in these. As there will be some overlap in what we are asking in the two sets of discussion, these additional interviews are unlikely to take as long as they would have done otherwise.

### **What will I get for taking part?**

As a thank you for your participation in the project, we have been offering a £10 gift voucher for each year that you are involved, which will still continue. In addition, because taking part in these focused studies will place more demands on your time, we will be offering an additional £20 gift voucher.

### **How long will I be committing to?**

We intend to conduct these focused investigations over two time periods, initially scheduled for Autumn 2013 and Autumn 2014. You are free to withdraw from taking part at any stage.

### **What happens to the information I provide?**

Everything that you tell us will remain strictly confidential, and only the research team will see your answers. The information you provide will not be passed onto anyone else and no one taking part in the project will be named in the research report.

### **How will you communicate with my friends/family, and others?**

Once you have agreed to be involved in this part of the project, we will contact you to for an initial discussion. As we plan the work we will also establish the key people you think we should approach. We will also ask you how would be best to make contact with them, and with your permission, make direct contact with them. We will produce an information sheet similar to this one which will explain what the project is and how we are hoping they can contribute.

### **What happens next?**

If you would like to take part, please sign and return the consent form to us. Please remember that you are free to withdraw from the research study at any time by contacting a member of the research team at [r.g.hewett@bham.ac.uk](mailto:r.g.hewett@bham.ac.uk) or on 0121 414 4394.

### **Thank you for taking the time to read about the project**

We very much hope that you will be able to help us. If you have any questions, or would like to find out more about the project, please contact Rachel Hewett, or Graeme Douglas at:

0121 414 4394 or 0121 414 6736

Email: [r.g.hewett@bham.ac.uk](mailto:r.g.hewett@bham.ac.uk)

Thank you from the research team.

Rachel and Graeme

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Transitions Project – Focussed Study Information Letter for Participants**

Dear

**Transitions Project – Focussed Study**

As we discussed previously, we are soon to start a new stage of work as part of the Transitions Project, which you are involved in. This work includes selecting a number of the participants currently contributing to the project, and conducting a more focussed investigation of their experience of post-14 transition.

We very much hope that you will agree to be one of these participants. As promised I attach an information sheet which provides a more thorough overview of what we are looking to do, and what we would ask of you.

If you are happy to take part:

- please sign the student consent form (it is fine to do so electronically);
- return the completed consent form either via email, or by sending it to the address given.

If you would like further information about this, or to discuss any concerns you may have, please contact one of the research team

Thank you for your support.

Best wishes,

Rachel Hewett and Graeme Douglas.

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **Participant Consent Form**

# UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I agree to be involved in the focused study as part of the on-going Transition project which I am already part of.

I understand that I can withdraw from this part of the project, or the project as a whole at any time

I have read the enclosed information sheet.

Signed:

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Name (printed):

---

Date:

---

Please return via email to:  or

**Rachel Hewett  
Transitions Project  
Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham  
B15 2TT**

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **Transitions Project – Semi-Structured Interview Schedule**

## **Transitions Project**

### **Semi-structured interview questions (ssiq)**

1. I would like to start by asking you to tell me about what you are currently doing. Are you studying at college, going to work, doing work experience or voluntary work, or none of these?
2. How do you feel this is going for you?
3. The Project that you have been part of for a couple of year now has been about transition, what do you understand by the word Transition?
4. Following your Transition from school/ college what is your life like now as compared to immediately after you left school? What was the most challenging or the hardest thing for you to deal with?
5. How did you deal with it? What did you do?
6. What type of decisions did you make that helped you deal with it? What were you feeling about it?
7. Considering how the transition process was for you when you left school/ college, what were the positive aspects of it? What made them feel positive for you? What have you found to be the most helpful to you since you left school/ college?
8. Compared to before the transition period of leaving school/ college, how do you see yourself nowadays?

9. What are your views of yourself, your family and professionals, such as teachers and careers advisors involved in supporting you before your transition from school/ college, during the transition and after the transition?
10. What do you put these views down to?
11. Before the transition process could you have seen yourself having these views?
12. How would you sum up the experience of transition? Did the experience have any influence on how you now view things?
13. Have you any advice to others who might be in a similar position to yourself before you left school/ college with how to deal with the transition from school/ college?
14. What have been the biggest changes in your everyday life since you left school/ college?
15. What is the most important thing to you in your life now? Has this always been the most important thing?
16. Are there any questions I should have asked that would have helped you “tell it like it is”?

## **APPENDIX 6**

**Participant 1 Transcribed Interview  
with accompanying analysis using Smith et al. (2009)  
staged progress**

<u>Potential/ Emerging Themes</u>	<u>Participant 1 Transcript</u>	<u>Initial Notes</u>
<p>Levels of support &amp; nature of that support in educational &amp; training contexts.</p> <p>Spectrum of experience ranging between dependence and independence – continuum. Personal responses to these contexts.</p> <p>Availability of support/ guidance for decision making purposes at transition points.</p> <p>Presence of specialist advice regarding study and career choice.</p> <p>Support systems &amp; influence on decision making.</p> <p>Issue of extent to which participant takes self-responsibility for personal and study-based challenges</p> <p>Study support and levels of independence/ dependence are themes evident.</p> <p>Being given</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. So perhaps we could start by talking, ****, about your school, about life at school</li> <li>2. before you did your GCSE's; how you found that.</li> <li>3. It was good, I mean for me, I got all of the support that I ever needed. Like I always got</li> <li>4. the support teachers and they enlarged text and other things like that. So I was... I</li> <li>5. chose the school because they were the most supportive when I went to visit.</li> <li>6. Oh, ok. What school was it, out of interest?</li> <li>7. ***** High.</li> <li>8. Oh, ok. Right oh. And what about the examination options that you, that you took? Tell</li> <li>9. me about how you went about choosing those.</li> <li>10. Well we went to the open evening when they had all the subjects on offer and we were</li> <li>11. there for 3 hours 'cause we went round and spoke to each individual teacher about</li> <li>12. how it would be if I took that subject,</li> <li>13. Right.</li> <li>14. And a few of them then were truthful and said this isn't really good for you. There was</li> <li>15. media studies and they said that there was a lot of visual stuff involved in that, so that</li> <li>16. was, I day take that. So I chose, in the end I chose history, music, business studies</li> <li>17. and graphic design.</li> <li>18. To do your GCSE's?</li> <li>19. Yeah.</li> <li>20. Ok. And how did you find your GCSE's when you actually started?</li> <li>21. They were good. They were... Like I said I got all the support that I need; the text that</li> <li>22. came from the subjects they were enlarged, so.</li> <li>23. Right, and that was one of the things in terms of the support you actually received; you</li> <li>24. had all the necessary text enlarged. Did you have any other support, any specialist</li> <li>25. teachers, or...?</li> </ol>	<p>Evidence of positive &amp; negative antecedents in terms of independence/ dependence continuum...lack of evidence in Yr 9 &amp; 10 (GCSE's) that focus of support had changed. Choice of school determined by level of support</p> <p>Was specialist advice regarding future directions at transition points available with respect to subject choice and curriculum accessibility as opposed to inclusive options at school at Yr 9. What was the effectiveness of Yr 9 Reviews? Extent to which responsibility for learning and doing one's own research and adaptation evident? Exclusion from some subjects due to visual impairment?</p> <p>Participant feels good support was available.</p>

<p>responsibility to assert himself regarding nature of support in school- support systems and how this encouraged independence?</p> <p>Issue of extent to which participant takes self-responsibility for personal and study-based challenges.</p> <p>Levels of support &amp; nature of that support in educational &amp; training contexts.</p> <p>Assertiveness in response to personal and study-based challenges.</p> <p>P1 recognises independence/dependence variable?</p> <p>Family involvement and guidance in decision making. Presence of specialist advice regarding study and career choice.</p> <p>Independence/dependence continuum</p> <p>Levels of support and the nature of that support in educational and training contexts.</p>	<p>26. I always had the option of having a support teacher in class with me, but some of the</p> <p>27. lessons I could say that I didn't need it and so then they would stay out.</p> <p>28. And did you feel, looking back, that that was enough support or that it was too much</p> <p>29. support?</p> <p>30. They were very good in giving me the freedom to be independent and say what I</p> <p>31. needed, and so as long as I was clear then they knew what they needed to do.</p> <p>32. And that's interesting 'cause one of the themes of this is my next question, the theme</p> <p>33. that'll sort of run through our interview is how independent then did you feel in terms of</p> <p>34. making decisions, in terms of planning ahead?</p> <p>35. Well that's another thing because when I went to visit them in the first place they pretty</p> <p>36. much just showed me around and then they let me lead them round so it was, they</p> <p>37. always let me be independent and make my own decisions and things like that.</p> <p>38. Right, ok. And then where did you move to then, after you'd done your GCSE's?</p> <p>39. I went to ***** College.</p> <p>40. You went to ***** College? So is that a sixth form college or a further education</p> <p>41. college?</p> <p>42. Further education college.</p> <p>43. Further education college, that's right, yeah. And how did that choice come about?</p> <p>44. Originally I wanted to go to ***** because I was going to go with my friend</p> <p>45. but my mom didn't want me to go that far.</p> <p>46. Oh, ok.</p> <p>47. So, but and a positive with ***** was that I could have transport; I could keep the</p> <p>48. taxi's but I wouldn't have been able to have it from ***** because it was too</p> <p>49. far. So that was another reason why I chose *****.</p> <p>50. Ok, that sounds quite interesting that. So, how did you find that move</p>	<p>Choices of types of support.</p> <p>P1 given freedom to be independent and opportunities to develop assertiveness?</p> <p>Perception of being encouraged to be independent.</p> <p>Choice of further education influenced by family. Presence or profile of specialist advice regarding this transition questionable.</p> <p>Apparent dependence on taxi and the focus of this on decision-making. Presence of orientation,</p>
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<p>Study based challenges – degree of self-advocacy and assertiveness.</p>	<p>51. or, as we call it in the project, that transition then, from school to ***** College?</p> <p>52. T: Well, again I was given the opportunity to visit the tutor and it was actually a lot</p> <p>53. easier this time because it was a single tutor so I could just nail down everything that I</p> <p>54. needed even before I went there.</p> <p>55. What did you want to, what were you going to study at *****?</p> <p>56. Music Technology.</p> <p>57. Right, ok, hence the single tutor. So what course was that?</p> <p>58. It was just Music Technology with a BTEC.</p>	<p>mobility and independent living skills questionable?</p>
<p>Availability of advice, support systems in decision making?</p>	<p>59. A BTEC, a BTEC course, ok. You've covered part of the answer to this question but</p> <p>60. it's interesting for us, I think, what sort of factors helped you make the choices you did,</p> <p>61. both in terms of going to ***** College and Music Tech?</p>	
<p>Taking responsibility? Being assertive/ exercising self-advocacy?</p>	<p>62. Well music came about from when I was in high school, I did, err, because music was</p> <p>63. one of my GCSE's I chose, we had to run a live show and I did that with my friend and</p> <p>64. I found that I really enjoyed that. And so I wanted to get into things like that. So then it</p> <p>65. came a choice of which college to go to to study for that. And then when</p> <p>66. ***** was kind of took off the table I went to ***** , but the tutor was more</p> <p>67. receiving at ***** than at *****.</p>	<p>Choice of GCSEs influenced further education courses being considered.</p>
<p>Levels of independence as opposed to dependence – orientation and mobility skills?</p>	<p>68. Oh really? But previously you just mentioned that there was an issue around</p> <p>69. transport?</p> <p>70. Yeah.</p>	<p>Dependent on transport suggests lack of independence skills that limits choice and options.</p>
<p>Influence of others (family and peers)/ decision making – Support systems</p>	<p>71. Ok. And you know when at that time, that decision making time about going to *****</p> <p>72. College, about doing this course rather than maybe another course, how, how</p> <p>73. independent did you feel at that point?</p>	<p>P1 feels that he was able to make an independent choice of course.</p>
<p>Independence and dependence. Responses to challenge regarding study and personal</p>	<p>74. There's definitely a lot of doors open, so I did have the choice to go where I wanted but</p> <p>75. I did, I chose music myself.</p> <p>76. Ok. Did you mention that your mom was influential in the choices around where you</p> <p>77. did the course though?</p>	<p>Parental influence and possible anxiety evident related to further education course choice...pressure to choose further education courses.</p>

<p>issues? Level of self-advocacy and assertiveness?</p>	<p>78. Yeah, she didn't want me to go as far because of the, I couldn't have transport to 79. ***** so she didn't want me, she wasn't really that secure about going all 80. that way. But I think if, I did give in myself in the end, but I think if I did pressure more 81. then I probably, my mom would've let me. So it was my choice to go to *****.</p>	
<p>Specialist advice and its availability?</p>	<p>82. What sort of.. What sources of support or advice were available for you at that point? 83. Or were you clear that that was what you wanted to do anyway? 84. That's what I wanted to do anyway. 85. You know if you'd needed advice, where would you have gone for it? 86. There was advisors in the school and I was pretty close with all of my support teachers 87. anyway, so I could always have gone to those.</p>	
<p>Extent to which advice was specialist and geared to P1 specific needs.</p>	<p>88. **** were those teachers offering you advice or were they you know the careers or 89. Connexions? 90. It was both.</p>	
<p>Availability of support systems.</p>	<p>91. Careers and Connexions? 92. It was the LSP's as well; the learning support practitioners, I think.</p>	<p>Concerns that becoming NEET might be an outcome for P1.</p>
<p>Resilience. Lack of mentoring or guidance? Solution focussed approaches.</p>	<p>93. Right, ok. Ok so that was the kind of introduction part of the interview, thanks for that. 94. Now we'll sort of look at that current situation that you find yourself in. We can start 95. talking about how things are going for you now. What are you currently doing at the 96. moment?</p>	
<p>Availability of specialist advice?</p>	<p>97. Nothing. I'm afraid it's a bit boring, I don't really do anything at the moment. 98. Ok, well thanks for that, for being honest. But, erm have you studied at, you've 99. obviously studied at college because you've been to ***** Did you ever go to 100. University? 101. I did yeah for 3 months. 102. Ok, do you feel like talking about that at all? 103. Yeah. 104. Can you sort of tell me a bit about that? So you, we got to the point</p>	<p>Short term placement at university prior to transition disruption.</p>

<p>Presence of specialist advice regarding study and career choice. Guidance and mentoring need suggested. Dependence on others – problem solving &amp; resilience?</p> <p>Evidence of self-advocacy/ assertiveness?</p> <p>Peer group influence on major transitions based decision making.</p> <p>Support systems in decision making?</p> <p>Self-advocacy, assertiveness, resilience? Apparent absence of these qualities?</p> <p>Independence/ dependence continuum? Peer group influence and support systems.</p>	<p>where you were</p> <p>105. going to ***** you were doing Music Technology, what happened then about</p> <p>106. deciding to go to university, or what choices did you feel that you had?</p> <p>107. Well, we went to, 'cause I went to *** uni and I'd heard a lot of good things about it,</p> <p>108. even my tutor, he went there as well. And so I went to the open day and after that I</p> <p>109. was pretty much decided that me, in fact me and all my friends were decided that we</p> <p>110. were going to go there. So..</p> <p>111. To ***** University?</p> <p>112. Yeah.</p> <p>113. To do a degree in?</p> <p>114. Yeah in film production and music technology. I only chose the film production and</p> <p>115. music technology because the way they described it, it was they took the best of both</p> <p>116. courses and put them into one. But it was the first year that they were running the</p> <p>117. course and it wasn't that great.</p> <p>118. H: Wasn't it? What happened?</p> <p>119. It was kind of just like they threw both of them together and there were cases where</p> <p>120. the tutors, they weren't really in sync with each other and so they were asking one</p> <p>121. thing and then a different tutor was asking another and it was just a bit of a mess.</p> <p>122. Right. And you know when you decided to go to ***** , you mentioned some of your</p> <p>123. friends were going, how much of an influence was that on your decision-making about</p> <p>124. going to *****?</p> <p>125. It definitely made it easier, knowing that I was going with people.</p> <p>126. In what way?</p> <p>127. It was more comforting because I knew that because my friend who was also going to</p> <p>128. be studying the same thing, I knew that if I needed help then he would be there, so it</p> <p>129. was reassuring to have him there.</p> <p>130. Ok, so without putting words in your mouth, it sounds like the course</p>	<p>University choice possibly influenced/ dictated by people P1 knew...wanted to attend with friends. Indication of reduced independence?</p> <p>Poorly informed choice of university developing dissatisfaction with course content.</p> <p>Going to this university "made it easier" as friends were there. To what extent would this reduce opportunities to embrace new friendships and practices in unknown</p>
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<p>Self-advocacy?</p> <p>Apparent lack of presence of specialist advice regarding study and career choice/ Need for mentoring and guidance?</p> <p>Addressing study based challenges?</p> <p>Degree of self-advocacy and assertiveness Is questionable?</p> <p>Lack of solution focused approach or involvement of specialist support, guidance or mentoring?</p> <p>Degree of influence of peer group.</p>	<p>was disappointing</p> <p>131. from the outset then.</p> <p>132. Yeah, a little bit.</p> <p>133. It didn't turn out to be what you thought it was going to be. And I guess I'm just asking</p> <p>134. you to think back about, again, about at what point you decided you wanted to leave</p> <p>135. the course.</p> <p>136. It was about the start of December time and I was just, I weren't happy there so I was</p> <p>137. like 'I don't want to do this for 3 years'.</p> <p>138. How long before it, you started feeling like that about the course? So you started in</p> <p>139. September?</p> <p>140. Yeah. It was about half way through November.</p> <p>141. Right. Tell me about some of the things that you did to try and... When you realised</p> <p>142. things weren't turning out as you wanted them, what did you do about it, if anything?</p> <p>143. Well, for a start, it took me a long time 'cause I was about 2 weeks or 3 weeks</p> <p>144. unhappy and I was like 'I'll see what happens' but after that I decided that I wanted to</p> <p>145. leave.</p> <p>146. Did you talk to anybody on.. Did you talk to any of the tutor team about it?</p> <p>147. Yeah, it was, I think, about a week into December I mentioned that I would like to leave</p> <p>148. and he says sometimes it just isn't for you, so.</p> <p>149. Right, and what about your friends who'd gone on the course with you? Did they stay</p> <p>150. on it, or?</p> <p>151. No.</p> <p>152. Oh, really?</p> <p>153. They left as well.</p> <p>154. How many people are we talking about?</p> <p>155. Well, there was 5 of us that went together, 4 of us left.</p> <p>156. Oh right, ok.</p>	<p>environments?</p> <p>This also suggests dependency on familiar others and therefore might suggest serve as a disincentive to be an effective self-advocate or need to be assertive?</p> <p>Choice of university course and apparent absence of specialist advice. Need for guidance or on-going mentoring to consider all options. Concerns may be perceived regarding P1's resilience/ self-advocacy skills/ problem solving strategies/ ability to see solutions?</p> <p>Course not going well – ability of P1 to be assertive to state own concerns.</p> <p>Apparent need to be more of a self-advocate/ assertive?</p> <p>Peer group influence evident in P1's choice of university.</p>
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<p>Seif-advocacy/ Assertiveness/ Peer group influence</p>	<p>157. But er, it was only 2 of us that was on the same course and then the other 3 were on, 158. another 2 were on the same course and they're the 2 that left as well. And then the 159. fifth was on his own. 160. So was this December 2012? 161. Yeah.</p>	
<p>Evidence of some structured support.</p>	<p>162. Right, ok. So was there anybody to, I mean clearly you're old enough and big and 163. strong enough to make your own decisions about leaving, was there anybody you 164. needed to, or felt that you could've gone to to try and...? I suppose what I'm, yeah 165. before that question, what if anything did your sight have, your visual impairment 166. have? What effect, or what influence do you think it had?</p>	
<p>Lack of assertiveness/ taking responsibility regarding support offered and provided.</p>	<p>167. I don't think it had any because the way that the course was set up, everything was 168. electronic anyway so I could take my laptop to the lesson then and bring up the power 169. point they had on the board, or anything, any sheets that they handed out they were 170. always uploaded on the internet that I could get after.</p>	<p>P1 suggests that his visual impairment was supported at university and that this wasn't a reason for the placement breaking down.</p>
<p>Dependence/ peer group influence/ self-advocacy?</p>	<p>171. Would you say that in those 3 months or so that you were on the course that the 172. support was adequate, was enough?</p>	
<p>Presence of specialist advice regarding study and career choice. Guidance and mentoring..</p>	<p>173. Well, I actually did say to that I didn't need any. 174. Ok. 175. Because my friend was there anyway and like I said everything was electronic so 176. anything I needed I could just bring up on my computer and have a look for myself. 177. And is that how it turned out then? 178. Mmm.</p>	<p>Possible denial by P1 to university staff that he had needs related to his visual impairment - indicates weak self-advocacy skills Apparent reliance on friends for visual impairment related needs.</p>
<p>Taking responsibility. Presence of specialist advice</p>	<p>179. So there was, so again I suppose a quite a lot of this interview ***** is about looking 180. back, is there anything that you would have done differently in terms of arriving at 181. ***** , is there anything you would've done differently, you know with the benefit of 182. hindsight? Or say somebody in a similar position to yourself with a vision impairment 183. was going on the same course next week, would you be saying anything to them?</p>	<p>On beginning and indeed breakdown of university course placement little evidence of intervention from specialist advisor</p>

<p>Response to study and personally- based challenges – self-advocacy and seeking solution-focused approaches.</p> <p>Levels of support/ mentoring and guidance? Presence of specialist advice.</p> <p>Resilience and problem solving skills.</p> <p>Apparent lack of specialist guidance at this time?</p> <p>Degree to which orientation and mobility as well as independent skills encourage less dependency.</p> <p>Degree to which P1 wishes to take responsibility for his current situation...self-advocacy...reliance on others to provide solutions?</p> <p>Degree to which p1 has independence and solution focused approaches. Access to advice and mentoring?</p>	<p>184. I think you definitely need to look more into it and see what, see every kind of support</p> <p>185. there is for you. I mean everyone’s different. For me I was fine, but others may not be.</p> <p>186. I mean the support was there.</p> <p>187. Right, ‘cause I suppose that’s one of the.... One of the obvious conclusions that you</p> <p>188. could easily jump to is that ‘Oh, ***** left university because they didn’t meet his visual</p> <p>189. needs’ but you’re actually saying that that wasn’t actually the case?</p> <p>190. No that wasn’t the case.</p> <p>191. No. that’s probably important for me to note that really. So you left December 2012 so</p> <p>192. we’re just into 2014 so we’ve had over a year, what’s been happening during the year</p> <p>193. for you?</p> <p>194. Nothing. I’ve been just trying to relax and enjoying the downtime.</p> <p>195. Have you?</p> <p>196. Yeah.</p> <p>197. So what have you, just hanging around at home or?</p> <p>198. Yeah pretty much (muffled)</p> <p>199. Pardon?</p> <p>200. It’s rare that I leave the house.</p> <p>201. Oh is it?</p> <p>202. Yeah.</p> <p>203. What do you do when you’re at home then?</p> <p>204. Er, I just go on my computer and talk with friends or play games.</p> <p>205. Ok. And how does that... How do you feel about the last year or so from that point of</p> <p>206. view, in terms of...?</p> <p>207. I mean, I’m happy.</p> <p>208. You’re happy?</p> <p>209. I don’t have any worries so it’s nice.</p> <p>210. Ok. Ok. The project, the transition project that you’ve been a part of for a couple of</p>	<p>or mentor.</p> <p>P1 admits that there is some merit in researching transition options regarding courses and levels of support needed. A degree of denial on needs evident?</p> <p>Denial that lack of visual impairment-related support led to university placement breakdown.</p> <p>P1 claims to be relaxing at home. Not attending any provision and one could hypothesise that “relaxing” is a euphemism for being NEET, not knowing where or how to pursue alternative routed to education, training or employment.</p> <p>Suggests that P1 is limited to his home context due to lack of options to pursue other options following breakdown of university course. Inertia/ reduced motivation is also suggested?</p> <p>Questionable as to</p>
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<p>Presence of specialist advice or mentoring to assist with key decision-making during transition – evidence of self-advocacy and assertiveness.</p> <p>Taking responsibility. Degree to which solution focused approaches were adopted.</p> <p>Peer group influence. Continuum of independence and dependence. Degree of specialist support and its availability.</p> <p>Responses to challenges both study based and personal.</p> <p>Problem solving and presence of specialist advice.</p> <p>Availability of specialist support and guidance. Degree of problem solving and assertiveness to address challenges.</p>	<p>211. years now has been about transition, I suppose what's your understanding of that</p> <p>212. word: transition?</p> <p>213. From going say from one place to another.</p> <p>214. Yeah, 'cause there's quite a lot of research that talks about people with visual</p> <p>215. impairments leaving school, how they're set up and people going either onto course</p> <p>216. or into work, but there's not very much research about how people make decisions, I</p> <p>217. suppose. So following, you've partly answered this, but following your transition from</p> <p>218. college, how would you say life is now? Compared to how you felt once you'd left</p> <p>219. school for example?</p> <p>220. It kind of felt like when I left school it was like the next step, like you go to college so</p> <p>221. you could get into university, and that's kind of why I did it. I mean I knew that I at least</p> <p>222. wanted to try university so I knew I had to go to college first and then that was why I</p> <p>223. decided to go.</p> <p>224. Ok, and what do you think was the most difficult or the hardest thing for you to deal</p> <p>225. with making that, first of all making the change from school to college?</p> <p>226. I think it's about looking at your strengths and what they can offer you, and in my case,</p> <p>227. I'd practically got everything that I needed so it was good.</p> <p>228. And what about the hardest thing for you to deal with going from college to university?</p> <p>229. Again, it was like because my friends were there it was very reassuring, so I didn't</p> <p>230. really have that many worries, but I guess it is important to look at what support there</p> <p>231. is going into it.</p> <p>232. But do you think you did that?</p> <p>233. Yeah.</p> <p>234. Yeah. And what about the biggest challenge that you're dealing with at the moment in</p> <p>235. terms of not being at university?</p> <p>236. I can't really say that I have any.</p> <p>237. Ok, no particular... ok that's fine. So in terms of future aspirations,</p>	<p>whether P1 has support from a mentor or specialist guidance to pursue other interests at this point?</p> <p>Little evidence of being able to advocate for self/ lack of self-advocacy skills. Lack of assertiveness evident. Reliance on peers/ friends – over-reliance?</p> <p>Apparent need to research possible transition routes regarding further education options and on-going need for support and guidance – this seems lacking? Reliance on friends to guide own transition-based choices.</p> <p>P1 appears to be denying that he has had to face</p>
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<p>Solution focused approaches. Independence – continuum and dependence and reliance on others. Lack of mentoring/ guidance.</p> <p>Presence of specialist advice. Guidance and mentoring appears lacking.</p> <p>Self-advocacy and taking responsibility – links to levels of independence and dependency.</p> <p>Presence of advice and guidance. Resilience and addressing study and personal challenges.</p> <p>Taking responsibility – degree of assertiveness and self-advocacy.</p> <p>Presence of advice and guidance and mentoring?</p> <p>Levels of support, nature of support and presence of advice?</p> <p>Not solution focused;</p>	<p>future ambitions, 238. what would you say that they are at the moment then ****?</p> <p>239. I've been thinking about getting into things with helping children 'cause I know that my</p> <p>240. experiences can be very helpful. But I haven't really got much further with that. But it's</p> <p>241. a thought in my head.</p> <p>242. So you're talking about working with children with visual impairment for example?</p> <p>243. Yeah.</p> <p>244. And have you spoke to somebody about that?</p> <p>245. No.</p> <p>246. It's just a thought. And if you thought more about that and you decided to do</p> <p>247. something about it, who would you go to advise you about that?</p> <p>248. There was the local VI service that would come and visit; I think I would start there.</p> <p>249. Ok. And is that, would you know who to contact and..?</p> <p>250. Yeah, there's a couple of people there that'd come to me for, they would help me in</p> <p>251. school and things from time to time, see what equipment I needed or check if I was</p> <p>252. doing ok.</p> <p>253. Ok. And going back to... Considering how the transition process was for you when you</p> <p>254. left school or college or university, what were the positive aspects of it as far as you</p> <p>255. were concerned?</p> <p>256. For me, I was always free to make my own choices, there was never anyone saying</p> <p>257. 'this place is better because they offer better support' or anything like that. They were</p> <p>258. always, they would present to me what support was there and then I could decide</p> <p>259. myself what I thought I needed and what I didn't.</p> <p>260. Ok, and what if anything have you found to be the most helpful advice or helpful</p> <p>261. source of support since you left school and college?</p> <p>262. I think having someone there that you can always talk to about what you need and</p> <p>263. what you don't, that's important.</p>	<p>challenges/ Suggestion that he has not addressed these, lacks problems solving strategies and is overly reliant on others? Appears to lack motivation, support, resilience....to pursue possible lines of future training. Lacks a mentor to motivate and inspire?</p> <p>Lack of current advice appears to be evident.P1 relying on sources of support available to him when he was attending secondary school ? Degree of dependence is suggested.</p>
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<p>evidence of weak problem solving and weak self-advocacy skills?</p>	<p>264. So for any general advice around benefits or around future employment or training you mentioned the visual impairment interest but generally do you know where to go for that kind of advice?</p>	<p>Lack of knowledge where to seek up to date advice. Lacks mentoring and regular "supervision"/ support in this regard.</p>
<p>Presence of specialist advice regarding study and career orientated decision making.</p>	<p>265. mentioned the visual impairment interest but generally do you know where to go for that kind of advice?  266. that kind of advice?  267. Not really.  268. Right. Is that something that... Is that a gap as far as you're concerned?  269. I think, again, it's err, I haven't really looked too far so it could be there but I'd probably start on the internet.  270. start on the internet.  271. Yeah, going back to, going back to school, when you were at school were there  272. specialist, did you have specialist careers advice? Do you remember having  273. specialists, people coming round because of your visual impairment to give you  274. advice?</p>	
<p>Availability of specialist advice with links to levels and nature of support. Presence of assertiveness and self-advocacy skills appears to be lacking.</p>	<p>275. Err, there wasn't really anything specialist for, at the school but the people that came  276. from, well the person that came from outside, they would always talk to me about it  277. and...  278. Specifically about your visual impairment?  279. Yeah.  280. The kind of jobs you could and the kind of jobs you could or, or the courses that you  281. could and couldn't do?  282. Yeah.  283. and who was that person? What agent, or where did, were they careers or were they  284. Connexions? Can you remember?  285. They came from, it was in, it was a ***** (LA Service), I forget the name but it was the visual  286. impairment service that they send out to, to assign to each, they have a number of  287. children that they go to.</p>	<p>Lack of clarity from P1 as to who provided school-based careers advice prior to transition from school. Lack of specialist advice post 16 years appears to be evident?</p>
<p>Resilience/ assertiveness/ taking</p>	<p>288. Right.  289. And then they would inform them and things.  290. So would you know***** (advisory teacher) then? Do you know ***** (advisory teacher)?</p>	

<p>responsibility for current context. Presence of mentoring / on-going support?</p> <p>Family involvement and specialist advice – role in degree to which P1 has been encouraged to be independent or dependent?</p> <p>Self-advocacy and assertiveness?</p> <p>Lack of self-advocacy and assertiveness – links to levels of independence and dependence? Resilience. Peer group influence.</p> <p>Orientation and mobility skills? Degree to which P1 has independent living skills?</p> <p>Peer group influence and assertiveness. Spectrum of reported experience ranging from dependence to independence.</p> <p>Levels of support and</p>	<p>291. Yeah, I did.</p> <p>292. Ok, I know *****, I used to work with *****.</p> <p>293. I've been on a couple of trips with her. So I've met a few of them.</p> <p>294. Oh right, ok. Compared to before transition, leaving school, leaving college, how do</p> <p>295. you see yourself nowadays?</p> <p>296. The same really.</p> <p>297. Ok. Are you, do you think you're more confident? Or less confident for example?</p> <p>298. I don't think I've changed because like I said, from the very beginning I was always</p> <p>299. free to be independent so I've been able to have that and grow that from the very</p> <p>300. beginning, and so it's stayed the same.</p> <p>301. Right. What kind of ways have you been encouraged to be independent then from</p> <p>302. quite a young age?</p> <p>303. They would just, they would always let me go around the school on my own and then</p> <p>304. they would just, they would always ask me what I needed and then they would never</p> <p>305. intrude or try and force anything on me.</p> <p>306. H: And you know when you went to, when you went to ***** College and when you</p> <p>307. went to ***** University, what about your independence then, in terms of getting</p> <p>308. around the place, getting around buildings, finding rooms, all that sort of stuff?</p> <p>309. It was, I guess since that they have more, the tutors they didn't really need to know as</p> <p>310. much but the support teachers there, 'cause I told them I didn't need it so they weren't</p> <p>311. there for it. But I knew if I had a good walk around with my friend and he would always</p> <p>312. tag along with me.</p> <p>313. Would you say that you relied quite a lot on your friend in terms of that your</p> <p>314. independence, or?</p> <p>315. Not as much for the independence but definitely at the beginning, I would walk around</p> <p>316. with him, just to get my bearings and then after that I would be ok.</p>	<p>P1 appears to have a rather exaggerated view of his own independence and seems unaware that he may be highly dependent on others – family and friends?</p> <p>Does this suggest that p1 would have benefitted from more encouragement to be more independent. More assertive and less reliant on others?</p> <p>P1 appears to lack self-advocacy skills/ assertiveness in unfamiliar contexts. Reliance on friends, not wanting to assert to others what his needs were. to advocate on his own behalf. A degree of denial of his own needs.</p>
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<p>nature of that support in educational contexts. Degree of self-advocacy promoted alongside assertiveness/ problem solving.</p> <p>Family involvement and guidance in decision making. Links to independence/ dependence continuum?</p>	<p>317. Right. Question 11, just so I can tell myself where I am on the tape. What are your</p> <p>318. views of yourself, your family, professionals, such as teachers and careers advisors</p> <p>319. involved in supporting you over this period of transition between leaving school, going</p> <p>320. to college, leaving college, going to university, leaving university? What are your views</p> <p>321. of yourself, you've probably touched on that but what about your views of your family</p> <p>322. in that process and the professionals in that process?</p> <p>323. Again, I'm lucky in the fact that I've always had people that are supportive and they've</p> <p>324. always let me chose what I wanted to do and they were never...</p> <p>325. Is this your family now?</p> <p>326. Yeah, this is my family. They would always be there and they would never try and</p> <p>327. force anything upon me.</p> <p>328. And what about professionals? Teachers, career advisors? You know looking back</p> <p>329. and getting, I won't quote you at all but do you feel that they've done the best they</p> <p>330. could've done or do you think with hindsight they might've made you do stuff that</p> <p>331. perhaps you didn't want to do but would've been good for you in the long run? Or do</p> <p>332. you think they got the support just about right?</p> <p>333. I think for me, they got it right. But it helps for, 'cause my sight doesn't change, so for</p> <p>334. that there was always a standard, so it never really had to change what they were</p> <p>335. doing.</p> <p>336. Right.</p> <p>337. So that probably helped a lot.</p> <p>338. Ok. Do you think they made you as independent as you could be when you were at</p> <p>339. school, when you were at college? Or do you think they could've pushed you to be</p> <p>340. more independent?</p> <p>341. I think the way that they did it was fine.</p> <p>342. Ok. Good. Before, this is where we go back in time, before you left school, say you</p> <p>343. were 15 in year 10 or something, could you see yourself where you are now? Or did</p> <p>344. you have a different view of where you'd be?</p>	<p>It could be suggested that P1 has not been encouraged to be more independent given his views expressed here. There is a query as to whether family and professionals have maintained high enough expectations for P1?</p>
<p>Levels of support and nature of support/ specialist advice and guidance?</p>		
<p>Links to independence and dependence/ taking responsibility/ resilience linked to addressing challenges and availability of support structures.</p>		
<p>Availability and influence of support structures? How has P1 become more of a self-advocate and assertive.</p>		<p>Acceptance of P1 of his current position following transition journeys post compulsory education – suggestion of low</p>

<p>Problem solving, availability of mentoring/ guidance/ availability of advice?</p> <p>Degree P1 is able to employ solution focused approaches to study and personal challenges currently encountered.</p> <p>Lack of mentoring/ guidance.</p> <p>Self-advocacy/ Levels of support and solution focused approaches.</p> <p>Specialist advice – availability.</p> <p>Taking responsibility.</p> <p>Independence and dependence continuum?</p> <p>Self-advocacy?</p> <p>Availability of support systems regarding study and career options.</p> <p>Self-advocacy/ assertiveness?</p>	<p>345. Err...</p> <p>346. How old are you now then?</p> <p>347. 19.</p> <p>348. 19, so say 4 years ago seems like a long time possibly, so 4 years ago can you</p> <p>349. see..... Do you think you would've been where you are now or?</p> <p>350. Well, 'cause, I mean games have always been a big part of what I do at home so I was</p> <p>351. practically doing the same thing.</p> <p>352. You talking about computer games now?</p> <p>353. Yeah, at home I would always be upstairs on my computer anyway, so I'm practically</p> <p>354. doing the same thing that I was 4 years ago.</p> <p>355. What games are you into?</p> <p>356. Anything..... Just everything.</p> <p>357. Right, ok.</p> <p>358. Except racing games because they're a bit too fast for me.</p> <p>359. So in a sense, looking back, perhaps 4-5 years ago you're not that, you know, you're</p> <p>360. not that, you're not surprised at where you're at now in terms of...</p> <p>361. Mm.</p> <p>362. Right ok. We're coming to the end of the interview now you'll be relieved to know, but</p> <p>363. in terms of how, how would you sum up the experiences of transition, and did those</p> <p>364. changes from school to college to university have any influence on how you view</p> <p>365. things now?</p> <p>366. I would say, as long as you're free to make your own choices then that's the best that</p> <p>367. can be offered to you. But the, I think as well, it's important that the options are put out</p> <p>368. there and that you understand what you're going into and...</p> <p>369. Options in what sense, *****?</p> <p>370. To say what you can do personally, and sort of what's... what's out there for your</p> <p>371. strengths.</p>	<p>aspirations?</p> <p>P1 is doing currently in his leisure time what he was doing some years ago – does this suggest a lack of progression or contentment. P1 is spending most of his time at home with no apparent transition plan currently.</p> <p>Apparent low aspirations indicative of weak self-esteem and resilience? Lack of guidance and mentoring is also evident?</p>
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<p>Addressing study and personal challenges – resilience, mentoring and support structures?</p>	<p>372. Ok. And would you have you any other advice to people who might be in a similar  373. position to yourself in terms of leaving school, going onto college and dealing with the  374. transitions? Say there was a room full of people younger than yourself.</p> <p>375. I think as long as you make sure that you look deeply into whatever you would like to  376. do then you can't really go wrong.</p> <p>377. And do you think you had every opportunity to do that?</p> <p>378. Yeah.</p> <p>379. You do. That's important. What's been the biggest, what's been the biggest changes in  380. your everyday life since you left university?</p>	<p>P1 advocates here for other people to research carefully their transition choices in order to inform decision making. Has p1 put into practice his own advice?</p>
<p>Presence of specialist advice/ assertiveness and self-advocacy/ solution focused approaches appear lacking?</p>	<p>381. Nothing. Nothing really, I've been doing the same thing for a while but it works, so.</p> <p>382. Ok. And the last part of the interview **** are the kind of finishing off questions and  383. gives you the chance to kind of say anything else you might want to say. So we're  384. coming to the end of the interview can we talk about any issues that I might've left out  385. that you think need discussing. I suppose a question would be what's the most  386. important thing in your life to you right now? I think you've covered that really, but do  387. you want to just repeat that, cover that... What's your kind of guiding philosophy of life,  388. in terms of you being a 19 year old young chap?</p> <p>389. I think as long as you're happy that's the most important.</p> <p>390. And you'd say you are happy?</p> <p>391. Yeah.</p> <p>392. Good. And, do you finally think there are any questions I should've asked that would've  393. helped you tell it like it is, in terms of transition? Leaving school, moving on in life.</p> <p>394. I don't think so. I think everything you've asked now and everything that's been asked  395. in the past, they've pretty much covered everything.</p>	
<p>Levels of support and availability of specialist advice/</p>	<p>396. So there's no yawning gaps, or..? Is there anything else you'd like to say about the  397. whole leaving school, going to college, going to university thing?</p>	

<p>influence of family/ influence of peers</p>	<p>398. Not really.</p> <p>399. So if there was a, when we eventually write all of this up and hopefully it will make a</p> <p>400. difference, the people who make policies and all the rest of it, do you think there are</p> <p>401. any messages from your own experience that can...?</p> <p>402. As long as you're, as long as the choices are there, then there's, and you understand,</p> <p>403. then that's the big thing.</p> <p>404. And who, just to ask you a final question, who would help you understand, who would</p> <p>405. make those choices available to your mind? You know who would make it clear to you</p> <p>406. what the choices are?</p> <p>407. I think in that case it would be your, you could ask everyone; like your family, your</p> <p>408. friends and the support teachers or teachers or careers advisors. Just, there's no harm</p> <p>409. in going to everyone and asking, so.</p> <p>410. And do you have any regrets?</p> <p>411. No not really.</p> <p>412. Ok. And is there anything in terms of advice or people that I can put you in touch with</p> <p>413. following this interview that might be helpful for you, following up any interests that</p> <p>414. you've talked about?</p> <p>415. I think, I can't think of any right now but if I did ever need any support would it be ok if I</p> <p>416. called?</p> <p>417. Absolutely, absolutely it would of course. Do you have an email address?</p> <p>418. Yeah I do.</p> <p>419. Can I take an email address?</p> <p>420. Yeah.</p> <p>421. What is it ***?</p> <p>422. <a href="mailto:*****@gmail.com">*****@gmail.com</a></p> <p>423. Because what I shall do, in the next couple of weeks I'll email you out just to say thank</p> <p>424. you, we'll sort out the vouchers for helping me out and then when you get that email</p>	<p>P1 emphasises the importance of choices being available to people encountering transitions.</p> <p>P1 encourages others to seek advice and to make informed choice. Questionable as to the degree to which P1 has followed this advice since transition from compulsory education.</p>
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	<p>425. you'll be able to get back to me if you need any advice around jobs or if you want to</p> <p>426. talk through anything we've talked through</p>	
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