

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF MOVING OUT OF BEING 'NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING' (NEET): AN EXPLORATION OF SIGNIFICANT FACTORS

By

JENNET GABRIEL

A thesis submitted to the
University of Birmingham
in part fulfilment for the degree
of Doctor in Educational Psychology
(EdPsychD)

School of Education
The University of Birmingham
July 2015

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact on young people of experiencing a period of being 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET). The literature emphasises the risks, disadvantages and negative long-term outcomes associated with becoming and being NEET. There is relatively little research on positive factors that enable young people to cope with and move on from this experience. The study uses concepts from self-determination theory (SDT - Deci and Ryan, 1985), a lifespan perspective (Bynner, 2005; Arnett, 2006), and eco-systemic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2001) to help to understand the experiences of the young people.

Nine young people aged between seventeen and twenty-four who had experienced a period of 'NEET' but who were now in education or employment, were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. Four professionals involved locally with young people in an educational, training or work capacity were also interviewed. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data.

Despite in many cases having experienced significant difficulties in their lives, most of the young people expressed optimism and confidence about their future. Key supportive factors in managing the experience of being NEET were the young people's inner resources and help from significant others. The young people identified that they needed more preparation and advice to equip them for adult life, both before and after leaving school. Links are made with the core concepts from SDT of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The implications for schools and support agencies are discussed.

DEDICATION

To my family and friends, for all their support

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful to Jane Leadbetter, my supervisor for all her encouragement, support and advice over the years.

Many thanks too, to my Principal EP and my colleagues for facilitating this study with their time, interest and practical support.

Finally, I would like to thank the young people and professionals who took part and generously shared their thoughts and experiences with me.

CONTENTS

	Page number
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION (p 1-11)	
1.1 Outline	1
1.2 Rationale for the study	3
1.3 Research aims and anticipated outcomes	9
1.4 Research context	10
1.5 Structure of the thesis	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW (p 12-61)	
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Definition of NEET	15
2.3 Critique of terminology and underlying assumptions	17
2.4 Trends and statistics	23
2.4.1 Education	24
2.4.2 Employment	26
2.4.3 Training	28
2.5 Policy responses in the UK	29
2.6 Research evidence	33
2.7 Identifying useful psychological frameworks	38
2.7.1 A lifespan perspective	39
2.7.1(i) Transitions	40
2.7.2 A systems perspective	42
2.7.2(i) 'Resilience' versus 'risk'	45
2.7.3 Self-determination theory (SDT)	48
2.7.3(i) Parental autonomy support	53
2.7.3(ii) Autonomy support in education	54
2.7.3(iii) Autonomy support in the workplace	57
2.8 Summary	59
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY (p 62-108)	
3.1 Introduction	62
3.2 Research questions	63
3.3 Ontological and epistemological assumptions	64
3.4 Research design	71
3.4.1 Rationale for choice of qualitative method	71
3.4.2 Thematic analysis	72
3.4.3 Discourse analysis	74

3.4.4 Narrative research	75
3.4.5 Interpretative phenomenological analysis	76
3.4.6 'Validity', 'reliability' and 'generalisation'	78
3.4.7 Ethical considerations	79
3.5 Method	83
3.5.1 Recruiting participants	83
3.5.2 Interview design	88
3.5.3 Pilot interviews	93
3.5.4 Interview process	94
3.5.5 Pen picture of the participants	96
3.6 Interviews with adult stakeholders	99
3.7 Data analysis of the interviews with the young people	103
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS (p 109-171)	
4.1 Introduction	109
4.2 Being 'in education, employment or training' (EET)	111
4.2.1 Learning from the NEET experience	114
4.2.1(i) Hindsight	114
4.2.1(ii) Self-efficacy	117
4.2.2 Support and opportunities to prepare for life beyond school	119
4.2.2(i) Education and learning	119
4.2.2(ii) Training and work	122
4.2.2(iii) Family and friends	125
4.2.3 How society views 'young people'	128
4.2.3(i) Being a young employee	128
4.2.3(ii) Importance of encouragement and support beyond family and friends	129
4.2.3(iii) Stereotypes	130
4.2.4 Looking to the future	132
4.2.4(i) Attitude to independence	132
4.2.4(ii) Optimism	135
4.2.4(iii) Insecurity	137
4.3 Being 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET)	138
4.3.1 Impact on personal identity	141
4.3.1(i) Coping strategies	141
4.3.1(ii) Degree of 'fit' with the young person's hopes and aspirations	143
4.3.1(iii) Other adverse life events	144
4.3.1(iv) Turning points	146
4.3.2 Significant relationships	147
4.3.2(i) Family	147
4.3.2(ii) Friends	150
4.3.2(iii) Professional support	152
4.3.3 School experience	155
4.3.3(i) Feelings about school	155

4.3.3(ii) Progress at school	157
4.3.3(iii) Help provided	158
4.4 Views of professionals	160
4.4.1 Overview	160
4.4.2 Perceived impacts on young people of being NEET	162
4.4.3 Supportive factors	164
4.4.4 Barriers	166
CHAPTER FIVE: DEDUCTIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION (p 172-207)	
5.1 Outline	172
5.2 NEET as a social construction	174
5.3.1 Perceptions of self	176
5.3.2 Significant relationships	180
5.3.3 Youth identity in society	184
5.2.3(i) Being 'young'	185
5.2.3(ii) Being 'NEET'	186
5.3.4 Help to prepare for adulthood	188
5.2.4(i) School	188
5.2.4(ii) Post-school education, training and work	190
5.2.4(iii) Feeling prepared for adulthood	192
5.3.5 Summary of supportive factors and barriers	194
5.4.1 Relevance of the lifespan perspective to the current study	195
5.4.2 Relevance of ecological models to the current study	196
5.4.3 Relevance of SDT to the current study	197
5.5 Preventative approaches – the role of schools	198
5.6 Supportive approaches once young people become NEET	205
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION (p 208-223)	
6.1 Overview	208
6.2 Summary and conclusions in relation to research questions	209
6.3 Contribution to knowledge	214
6.4 Implications for the role of schools and other agencies post-sixteen	215
6.5 Implications for the role of EPs	217
6.6 Recommendations	218
6.7 Limitations of the study	219
6.8 Suggestions for future research	223
REFERENCES	224

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Description	Page number
Appendix 1	Interview schedule used with the young people	239
Appendix 2	Information sheet for the young people	245
Appendix 3	Consent form for young people	247
Appendix 4	Consent form for parents of young people aged less than eighteen	248
Appendix 5	Interview schedule used with the professionals	251
Appendix 6	Extract from grid with initial coding derived from one interview transcript	252
Appendix 7	List of 55 basic codes derived from the interviews	259
Appendix 8	Relationship between global themes, main themes, subordinate themes and basic codes for 'EET'	260
Appendix 9	Relationship between global themes, main themes, subordinate themes and basic codes for 'NEET'	261
Appendix 10	Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the responses to how the young people felt 'then' at the time they were NEET and how they feel now	262

LIST OF FIGURES

	Description	Page number
Figure 2.1	Visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development (2001)	43
Figure 3.1	Time line grid used during the interviews with young people	92
Figure 3.2	Grid to support discussion about what the young person found helped or didn't help when they were 'NEET' and since moving out of 'NEET'	92
Figure 4.1	Final thematic map showing global theme: being 'in education, employment or training'	113
Figure 4.2	Final thematic map showing global theme: being 'not in education, employment or training'	140
Figure 4.3	Network analysis of the main and subordinate themes identified in the interviews with professionals	161

LIST OF TABLES

	Description	Page number
Table 2.1	Risk factors associated with being ‘NEET’ for six months or more	22
Table 2.2	Policies aimed at reducing the number of young people who are ‘NEET’	31
Table 2.3	Extract from the ecological framework of analysis for 14+ participation, progression and transition (PPT) by Hodgson and Spours (2013)	45
Table 3.1	Approaches for ensuring that my qualitative study is defensible, based on Yardley’s four core principles (2008)	78
Table 3.2	List of criteria for including young people in the study	84
Table 3.3	List of ‘thoughts and feelings’ words and frequency categories	93
Table 3.4	‘Pen picture’ of the nine young people who took part	97
Table 3.5	‘Pen picture’ of professional roles of the adults interviewed	100
Table 4.1	Relationship between the main themes and subordinate themes for being ‘in education, employment or training’	112
Table 4.2	Relationship between the main themes and subordinate themes for being ‘not in education, employment or training’	139
Table 5.1	Relationship between the themes in Chapters Four and Five	174
Table 5.2	Supportive factors and barriers in the accounts of the young people and the professionals	194

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

‘Youth stands out as the interface between the generations: the means by which society renews or tears up the intergenerational contract with the next generation to supply a fulfilling adult life’ (Bynner, 2012, p. 39)

1.1 Outline

This chapter provides a broad overview of this research study and the structure of the thesis. It first sets out the background context, and the rationale for conducting the study, as linked to my professional practice, personal interests, and to knowledge in the field. The principal aims and anticipated outcomes of the study are then considered. Finally there is a brief explanation of the content of each chapter.

In industrialised societies there is much evidence to suggest that the task of making the transition from adolescence to adult life is becoming increasingly complex and challenging for all young people, but especially those considered to be ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘vulnerable’. One group of young people widely regarded as ‘disadvantaged’ and therefore a focus for concern and policy initiatives, is those who are ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET).

The term 'NEET' was first coined by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) set up by the Labour Government (1997-2001) in 1999 (SEU, 1999).

In the literature review I argue that there are many difficulties and limitations to using this label, but I also justify my rationale for using the term 'NEET' to describe the previous situation of the young people who took part in this study. I use the term 'EET' to describe the situation of being 'in education, employment or training'.

Most of the literature concerning young people who are NEET focuses on the risks associated with becoming and being NEET, the negative outcomes for such young people in their later lives, and the policies to address these problems. There is relatively little research on positive factors that enable young people to cope with being NEET and to move on from this experience. Given that increasing numbers of young people in the current economic climate seem likely to face periods of being NEET in making the transition to adulthood, it seems incumbent on educators and support agencies to improve the services they offer in order to prepare and equip young people appropriately for these challenges.

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of nine young people aged between seventeen and twenty-five who had recently experienced a period of being NEET but who had subsequently moved on to EET. I also interviewed four professionals involved with young people in an educational, training or work capacity after they leave school, about their views of the

impacts of being NEET on young people, and factors which were supportive or were barriers in helping them to achieve success. The perspectives of the young people and the adults were compared to identify and consider any similarities and differences. Psychological frameworks from lifespan perspectives, eco-systemic theory and self-determination theory were utilised to explore significant factors which emerged.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The idea for undertaking this research has emerged through a combination of professional and personal interests. Working to improve the educational and life chances of disadvantaged children and young people, whatever form that disadvantage takes, has for many years been considered to be fundamental to the role of educational psychologists (EPs). The range of 'additional needs' typically encountered by EPs includes learning difficulties or disabilities, disengagement from school, mental health or other health problems, difficulties with transitions, experience of being in public care, economic and social disadvantage, family difficulties, being in trouble with the police, and being NEET.

Until recently, EPs have primarily worked with children and young people between the ages of birth and nineteen, and involvement at the upper end of the age range has tended to focus on young people with special educational needs (SEN) who remained at school or college. However EP involvement with young adults up to the age of twenty-five will undoubtedly increase with

changes such as the introduction of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) to replace statements of special educational needs, which will cater for young people with SEN or disability (SEND) up to the age of twenty-five (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015); and the raising of the Participation Age (RPA) which from 2015 requires young people to access education or training up to the age of eighteen (Department for Education and Skills, 2008).

The 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years' (DfE and DOH, 2015) places a very strong emphasis on preparing for adulthood. Chapter Eight is entitled 'Preparing for adulthood from the earliest years' and states that (p. 120):

'It sets out how professionals across education (including early years, schools, colleges and 16-19 academies), health and social care should support children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities to prepare for adult life, and help them go on to achieve the best outcomes in employment, independent living, health and community participation.'

In the Division of Educational and Child Psychology Monograph 'British Educational Psychology: The First Hundred Years' (Arnold and Hardy, 2013), Chapter Twelve by Allen and Hardy on the future of educational psychology, anticipates a future role for EPs in working with young adults, and specifically emphasises the ethical responsibility towards young people who are NEET (Allen and Hardy, 2013, p. 146). However they point out the need for adequate

professional training and supervision to work with this age group, in line with the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009, p. 146).

In the case of new entrants to the profession, work has been underway to develop a curriculum and professional competency framework for the initial training of educational psychologists, to equip them to work with young people aged between sixteen and twenty-five (OSPA Project, 2013; Atkinson et al, 2015). This project has involved collaboration between three doctoral educational psychology training programmes at University College London, the University of Manchester and the University of Southampton. The researchers initially consulted with EPs who had relevant expertise in working with this age group, and from this process a consensus emerged that the curriculum would need to contain new knowledge, to extend some areas of knowledge, and would also need to cover the process skills required for trainee EPs to deliver psychological services in relation to sixteen to twenty-five year olds. The final outcome for this aspect of the project has been to produce a detailed curriculum for doctoral training, which covers the six core areas of context, legislation and policy, assessment, intervention and outcomes, development, and transition.

For practising EPs, bespoke training is being offered by independent consultants with relevant experience of working with this age group, and some Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) are organising such training for their teams.

In Scotland, a specific role for the EP profession in working with young adults has been developed for more than ten years. The Scottish Government has provided universal funding for Post- School Psychological Services (PSPSs) since 2004, although this area has not been immune to recent reductions in public spending. A special issue of *Educational and Child Psychology*, devoted to PSPSs, was published in 2009 (Mackay and Hellier, 2009). In this issue EPs from various Scottish local authorities describe the contributions the profession has made to the development of PSPSs (Craig, 2009; Currie and Goodall, 2009; Haughey, 2009).

The Local Authority (LA) Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in which I work has along with others, been actively considering how best to prepare for working in settings other than schools, and with young adults who are up to twenty-five years of age. We have previously had occasional involvement at a casework level with young people aged sixteen and above who have been referred to us by agencies such as the Youth Service or the Youth Offending Team. This work has typically consisted of carrying out assessments to identify needs, and providing advice to agencies working with the young person. Team members are also endeavouring to make links with schools that have sixth forms.

Having attended a recent conference on 'EPs work with 16-25 year olds: Sharing Good Practice' (The West Midlands Continuing Professional Development Group, 2014), I am aware that EPs in neighbouring LAs are developing work with Further Education (FE) Colleges, mainly with young

people who are Looked After. Young people who are NEET will however be more challenging to reach because they are not in any educational or employment setting. In the discussions about EP involvement with young people post-sixteen, those who are NEET feature rather less frequently than other more 'visible' groups, such as those who are Looked After or those with SEN or Disability.

As a practising EP and a parent of 'emerging adults', I have a particular personal interest in the social construction of 'adolescence', 'emerging adulthood' and the impact of changes in society (such as changing employment patterns, extended formal education, an ageing population and so on) on attitudes towards individuals at this phase of life. EPs work with many 'disadvantaged' children and young people who may be perceived as 'problematic' by adults and by wider society in general. This perception frequently grows as they enter adolescence and become more independent, and less susceptible to the influences of parents and schools. In the local authority where I work, much of the complex casework appears to be with secondary age students who are not attending school or who are struggling with school for a variety of reasons. Their difficulties are often entrenched, and the adults in their lives seem at a loss as to how to help. As 'resistance to school' has been identified as a potential risk factor in later becoming NEET, and as many of these students are subject to other associated risk factors, I wonder about their future life trajectory and if these factors influence outcomes for them as adults.

Relevant contextual factors for this research locally and nationally, include the impact of 'austerity' on local authority spending and the resulting changes to public services. All LAs in England have responded to the Education Act 2011, which moves the duty to provide a statutory universal careers service from LAs to schools. In the LA where I work, the former Connexions service has recently been reorganised to become a 'specialist careers service'. This service is considerably smaller than its predecessor and has changed from having a 'universal' remit with all young people aged between fourteen and nineteen, to being 'targeted' at specific groups of young people deemed to be 'vulnerable', including those who are NEET. Over the past four years there have been reductions locally in the percentage of young people who are NEET, but the question is how to sustain and build on these improvements, in the context of the current challenging economic climate and the changes to Connexions.

To summarise, the EP role in working with disadvantaged young adults and in particular with those who are NEET is at an emergent stage, although there is a body of potentially relevant research, policy and practice from other disciplines. There seems to be scope for EPs to form links with post-sixteen providers, to explore and develop understanding of the necessary 'protective and supportive' factors to help young people (particularly those who may be 'disadvantaged') to better navigate the transition between school and adult life.

1.3 Research aims and anticipated outcomes

The main aim of my study was to investigate young people's perceptions of the time when they were 'not in education, employment or training', compared with their perceptions of their current situation, having moved on in their lives. I chose to make the study retrospective on ethical grounds; believing that young people might find it easier and less stressful to talk about the potentially difficult experience of being NEET if it was in their past. My intention was to identify which factors the young people perceived as having a significant positive impact in helping them to cope with and move on from the experience of being NEET, while also acknowledging the reality of potential 'risk factors' in their lives. I was also interested in their thoughts on how the support from educational settings, LAs and voluntary agencies could be improved for other young people navigating this important transition. A further aim was to explore implications for the role of EPs (if any) in working with young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or who are NEET.

Chapter Three describes how I developed detailed research questions based on my broad research aims and key themes from the literature.

Since EP practice in working with young people post-sixteen and particularly with those who are NEET is at an early stage in England, the outcomes I anticipated for my study were:

- To contribute to local knowledge of how young people perceive the experience of being NEET and moving onto EET, by obtaining their first-hand accounts
- To identify factors that may help young people to manage being NEET, and those that may hinder them in this regard
- To explore how well young people thought they were supported and their views on how the support could be improved
- To share the findings with appropriate agencies
- To contribute to our reflections as an EPS on working with young people post-sixteen, and young people who are NEET in particular
- To suggest potential areas for future research

1.4 Research context

This study was conducted in a small local authority where I work as an EP.

Overall deprivation is low, but parts of the borough fall into the most deprived fifth of areas in England (Audit Commission, 2009). According to information in the [Name of Council] Economic Conditions Scorecard (2014), 5.5% of young people aged sixteen to eighteen (370 individuals) were defined as being NEET in December 2013. Amongst the eighteen to twenty-four age group there were 800 people claiming Job Seeker's Allowance in May 2014, which equates to an unemployment claimant rate of 5.0%. The percentage of claimants in the

eighteen to twenty-four year age group is higher than the national average for England. The percentage of young people who are NEET or unemployed is much higher in the more deprived areas of the borough ([Name of Council] Unemployment Briefing, May 2014).

As the EPS does not currently have routine access to the group of young people I wished to include in my study, I contacted the Specialist Careers Service, a local FE College, the Youth Service, a local work based learning provider, and an Employment Officer in the LA for help in identifying and contacting potential participants. The process of recruiting young people is described in detail in Chapter Three.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

In Chapter Two I review the relevant literature in relation to the policy context and discuss psychological models which have informed the research. Chapter Three describes the methodology, research design and methods I used in my study. In Chapter Four I present my findings and initial analysis. Chapter Five has a focus on further analysis of the findings in relation to the literature in this area. In the final chapter I outline the strengths and limitations of the study, summarise my conclusions in relation to the literature, and identify potential areas for future research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The last fifty years in particular have been characterised by far reaching and rapid social changes in industrialised societies brought about by globalisation and technological development (Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Bynner, 2005; Arnett, 2006). These changes affect people at all stages of life, but are having a particular impact on young people's experiences of the transition from adolescence, (considered in industrialised societies to be a transitional phase where individuals remain relatively dependent on adults); to adulthood, (where social and economic independence is achieved) (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Furlong, 2009a).

This impact is evident from a wealth of survey data from different countries, of social change indicators such as age at first marriage, economic activity rates in the fourteen to twenty-four year old age group, participation in education and training, numbers of lone-parent families and entry to higher education.

Although care should be taken in making generalisations from a complex and variable picture, a number of broad trends can be discerned. Young people in industrialised societies are marrying and starting families at a later age, the birth

rate has fallen, participation in higher education has become more widespread, and levels of youth unemployment are increasing (Bynner, 2005; Arnett, 2006).

Psychologists and other social scientists have long been interested in a developmental perspective of the human life course and how individuals navigate tasks and challenges at different stages (Erikson, 1963), but it is relatively recently that the social policies of industrialised countries have included an emphasis on supporting young people to make a successful transition into adult life. To some extent this emphasis has been stimulated by anxiety regarding the impact on individuals but also on society as a whole, of having increasing numbers of young people who are not participating in education, employment or training and who are consequently perceived as not having 'a stake' in their local and wider community (HM Government, 2011; UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2012).

Hendry and Kloep (2010, p. 169), citing work by Beck (1992) and Castells (1998) suggest that traditional developmental tasks (for example, gaining independence from parents, developing new relationships with parents, peers and partners, and finding ways to make a living):

‘...are problematic, differently ordered, and present today’s young people with significant challenges in gaining adult status.’

Furthermore, there is much evidence to support the view that in the United Kingdom (UK) the barriers to participation for disadvantaged young people are disproportionately greater (Barnardo’s, 2009; 2010; 2011). Bynner (2005)

argues that longitudinal studies of UK birth cohorts in 1946, 1958 and 1970 demonstrate the twin phenomena of rising opportunities but at the same time, increased social inequality.

In summary, the transition to adult life is becoming more complex and challenging for all young people, but especially those defined as 'disadvantaged'. This term will be further defined and discussed, but broadly speaking, encompasses young people with a diverse range of additional needs, arising from the interplay between factors in the individual, family, school, local community and the wider world.

The first part of the literature review, analyses and critiques how the UK in particular has responded to the challenges presented by rising numbers of young people who are NEET, with a particular focus on those most disadvantaged. The body of research which informs this area is drawn from a number of disciplines, including education, sociology, social policy, economics, careers guidance and statistics; however the literature seems to draw relatively little on psychological theories. This is perhaps because the focus in other disciplines is primarily on factors which impact at the macro-level, rather than on the personal experiences of individuals. An exception is ethnographic studies, such as the longitudinal study carried out by Simmons and his colleagues of twenty young people who had spent periods categorised as NEET, which focused in depth on their lived experiences (Simmons, Russell and Thompson, 2014).

When I embarked on this study it appeared to me that some psychological theories might usefully be applied to help understand the experience of young people who are NEET, although few research studies explicitly make these links. As for educational psychology, a review of relevant research journals revealed virtually no mention of applying psychology with this group of young people, with the notable exception of some of the work within the post-school psychological services in Scotland, and work carried out by Arnold and Baker (2012), an educational psychologist and a Connexions personal advisor respectively, in an English LA. The second part of the literature review discusses psychological theories which I applied to my study: aspects of the psychology of 'emerging adulthood', including models of transition; ecosystemic approaches, including a discussion of risk and resilience; and self-determination theory.

2.2 Definition of 'NEET'

This study adopts the definition of NEET status set out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2013, p. 1) when it first began to publish quarterly estimates of the number of young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET):

- 'For these statistics, a person is NEET if they are aged 16 to 24 and not in education, employment or training. Within the ONS estimate, a person is considered to be in education or training if they:
- are doing an apprenticeship;
 - are on a Government employment or training programme;
 - are working or studying towards a qualification;

- have had job-related training or education in the last four weeks; or
- are enrolled on an education course and are still attending or waiting for term to (re)start.

Therefore, anybody aged 16 to 24 who is not in the above forms of education or training and who is not in employment, is considered to be NEET. The definition of “in employment” follows that used for the official labour market statistics. This definition is based on that recommended by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).’

While this definition seems to be clear, the estimates of NEET figures which are in the public domain vary and are difficult to interpret. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the ONS points out that the data base is not harmonised across the four constituent countries of the UK: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Second, information is collected for various purposes by different departments, from different sources and for different age ranges, which influence how the data is gathered and presented.

In a House of Commons Library review of young people who are NEET, Mirza-Davies (2014, p. 1) explains the important distinctions between different groups of young people covered by the statistics:

‘Not all unemployed 16-24 year olds are NEET and not all people who are NEET are unemployed. 61% of unemployed 16-24 year olds are NEET, the remaining 40% are in education or training. 47% of people who are NEET are unemployed, the rest are economically inactive: not seeking work and/or not available to start work.’

The picture is complicated because of the varying destinations of young people post-sixteen. Responsibility for those in education lies with the Department for

Education (DfE), while responsibility for those in employment lies with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The main point worth noting is that information for sixteen to eighteen year olds is often presented separately from information for young people aged between eighteen and twenty-four.

Regardless of these distinctions, the overall figure for young people who are NEET remains stubbornly high. Mirza-Davies (2014) states that 954,000 people aged 16-24 were NEET in the second quarter of 2014, which is 13.1% of people in this age group. The areas in England with the highest proportion of young people who are NEET are the North East, Yorkshire & Humber, and the West Midlands.

2.3 Critique of terminology and underlying assumptions

Arnold and Baker (2012) make the important point that all terminology and in turn definitions and perceptions of categories such as 'young people', 'employment', 'unemployment' and 'NEET' are firmly grounded in their historical and cultural context. These terms also have subjective connotations. The following discussion examines and critiques the terminology of 'social exclusion'; 'disadvantage' and 'NEET' as they have been applied to young people.

In the UK, 'social exclusion' was a term particularly associated with the policies of Labour Governments between 1997 and 2010. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 1999, p. 2) defined 'social exclusion' as:

'what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown.'

A closely related term is 'disadvantage', which according to Williams (2011) is as ill-defined as 'social exclusion' in Government policy. As with 'social exclusion' this term is a relative one, implying that positioning an individual as 'disadvantaged' must be in comparison to other individuals who are 'advantaged'. Barnes (2005) comments that, although for over a century there has been interest in exploring aspects of inequality in society such as poverty, deprivation and hardship, there is no unique and universally accepted definition of disadvantage. However, the important literature review of cycles of disadvantage, by Rutter and Madge (1976) developed the thinking that there were many forms of disadvantage that arose in different ways, and which showed continuities and discontinuities between generations. Recent analyses of large scale quantitative survey data such as that carried out by Barnes (2005) suggest that in the UK, disadvantage is a complex and multi-faceted process occurring across measures of *household economic deprivation*, *personal civic exclusion* (disadvantage according to perception of the neighbourhood and social relations), and *personal health exclusion* (disadvantage according to physical and mental health).

Morris, Barnes and Mason (2009) state that 'social exclusion' has always been a highly contested term, as the following points illustrate. In the first place, as Pemberton (2008) notes, the SEU definition is vague as it does not identify the causes of such problems nor the most appropriate policy responses. A related point is that the concept has a variety of meanings and underlying assumptions attached to it (Spandler, 2007). Levitas (2005) suggests that three main discourses of social exclusion can be identified in official policy and academic analysis. The redistributionist discourse (RED) highlights the necessity to overcome poverty and inequality if 'inclusion' is to be achieved; the moral underclass discourse (MUD) locates the causes of exclusion in the moral and behavioural weakness of those excluded; and finally the social integrationist discourse (SID) emphasises work as the route to social integration and cohesion.

Successive Labour Governments (1997-2001, 2001-2005, and 2005-2010) were widely criticised, first, for narrowly equating social exclusion with unemployment and social inclusion with being in work (a SID discourse), and second, for increasingly turning to MUD explanatory frameworks which focused on the personal deficits of the excluded themselves (Levitas, 2005; Chadderton and Colley, 2011; Thompson, 2011). The 'deficit' discourse included both overtly blaming young people who do not follow the expected pathways as a 'threat' to society (Davis, 2007; Rose, Daiches and Potier, 2011) and a more subtle process of labelling them as 'psychologically vulnerable because of learning difficulties, a lack of self-esteem or self-confidence or low aspirations' (Department for Education and Skills, DfES 2007). These assumptions have

created a rationale for intervening to support individuals by addressing their perceived psychological disadvantages, for example by offering 'therapeutic' type interventions (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Brunila, 2012). Williams (2011, p. 466) commented that with the Coalition Government (2010-2015) she detected 'an intellectual shift towards a less vulnerable concept of the individual', however, she noted that recent policy statements employ deficit models of some young people based on MUD frameworks.

Similar criticisms have been levelled at the term NEET; in particular the discourse of 'social exclusion' and 'individualisation' (Furlong, 2007; Thompson, 2011; Williams, 2011; Fergusson, 2013), which assumes a deficit, individualised model of NEET, and identifies solutions in terms of rectifying personal and cultural features within individuals, rather than recognising the structural basis of inequality in education and training, and in wider society. For example, Thompson (2011, p. 785) argues that 'stronger versions of social exclusion need to be used in constructing solutions which acknowledge the basis of NEET issues in wider social inequalities.'

Yates and Payne (2006, p. 330) highlighting research evidence from the Connexions Impact Study, argue that 'NEET' is a problematic concept because of its negative connotations. In policy terms, NEET status was (and continues to be) equated with 'a raft of risks, problems and negative orientations on the part of young people.' It is also a blanket term that lumps together a heterogeneous mix of young people in very diverse circumstances. For example, in the Connexions study, 'NEET' included those who were in a

temporary period of being NEET; young parents who made a conscious decision to be NEET for a time to look after their children; and young people who were NEET and who also exhibited a number of complications or 'risks' in their lives (such as being homeless or looked after, engaged in offending behaviour, having emotional and/or behavioural problems, resisting school, etc.).

Notwithstanding the criticisms and negative overtones of NEET status, it is impossible to ignore the available research which clearly shows the statistical association between being NEET and a raft of 'risk' factors (SEU, 1999; Bynner, 2001; Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Pemberton, 2008; Bynner, 2012). These are: offending behaviour, substance misuse, health problems and/or disabilities, learning difficulties and/or special educational needs, emotional and/or behavioural problems, school resistance, academic underachievement, being looked after or homeless, being an asylum-seeker or refugee, and having parental and/or caring responsibilities. Mirza-Davies (2014) using data from the Audit Commission Report 'Against the Odds' (2010) tabulates the increased likelihood of young people becoming NEET in association with certain risk factors:

Table 2.1: Risk factors associated with being ‘NEET’ for six months or more. Source: Audit Commission analysis of Connexions data from fieldwork areas (approximately 24,000 young people), 2010

Mirza-Davies, 2014

Factor	Increase in chance of being NEET for six months or more
Being NEET at least once before	7.9 times more likely
Pregnancy or parenthood	2.8 times more likely
Supervision by youth offending team	2.6 times more likely
Fewer than three months post-16 education	2.3 times more likely
Disclosed substance abuse	2.1 times more likely
Responsibilities as a carer	2.0 times more likely

This data does not capture the impact on individuals of experiencing multiple risk factors.

Arnold and Baker (2012) further stress, that if young people become NEET without any experience of work, they are more at risk of long term poverty, than young people who have experienced work. This evidence strongly validates the case for appropriate and sensitive intervention to support those most likely to need it, while remaining critical of ‘within- person’ explanations for being NEET.

To conclude, despite the reservations highlighted in the preceding discussion about ‘social exclusion’, ‘disadvantage’ and ‘NEET’, these terms have some validity in identifying the complex challenges faced by some young people in

making the transition to adult life, they have focused the minds of policy makers on the wider set of problems confronting young people and they thus have been a catalyst from which additional resources flow. Furthermore, the standard definition of NEET is widely utilised to collect statistical data and this provides a rich source of contextual information and a means of making comparisons between different studies. I have therefore adopted the ONS term and the definition of NEET in this study, while acknowledging its limitations and its negative connotations. The need to avoid making assumptions about the supposed characteristics of those who are labelled as NEET, is amply demonstrated even in this small study, by the diverse experiences and perceptions of the young people who took part.

2.4 Trends and statistics

This section considers how successful the UK has been compared with other advanced economies in providing its young people with education, employment and training.

Some important indicators which have a bearing on the above question are found in the report on children's material circumstances and wellbeing produced by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2007. This compared twenty-one countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The educational well being measure placed the UK towards the bottom of the league table, in achievements at age fifteen in literacy, numeracy and science; the percentage of those aged fifteen

to nineteen in education; the percentage of those aged fifteen to nineteen not in education, employment or training, and the percentage of those aged fifteen who expect to be in low skilled work (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2007; Morris, Barnes and Mason, 2009).

A recent update of this report in 2012 comparing thirty-five countries, showed improvement in the position of the UK on some dimensions; however the latest available data only cover up to 2009 and therefore do not reflect the full impact of the current economic and financial crisis (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2012). It seems a strong possibility that the position of the UK will slip back once again, when the report is next updated.

It is important to highlight that 'education', 'employment' and 'training' are not mutually exclusive categories. There has always been some overlap between them, and this is likely to increase with changes such as the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA), the growing need to access additional qualifications in the workplace, and the increased variety of provision for further education and training.

2.4.1 Education

With regard to education, the UK has, in common with other developed economies seen increasing numbers of young people staying on in post-compulsory education. By the end of the 1980s, the percentage of those staying on had just begun to exceed 70%, compared with less than 50% through most

of the preceding decade (Bynner, 2001). By 2014, 89% of sixteen to seventeen year olds were in full-time education compared to 74% in the first quarter of 2002, and there has also been an increase in participation in full-time education among eighteen to twenty-four year olds (Mirza-Davies, 2014).

It is not clear what the long term impact will be on participation and attrition levels, of changes such as Raising the Participation Age (RPA), the continued increase in the number of Academies, and the addition of new forms of post-sixteen education such as Free Schools, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools.

The sharp rise in tuition fees for 2012 – 2013 initially led to an overall reduction in applications for higher education, but the Independent Commission on Fees (ICoF, 2014, p. 5) reported that application rates among eighteen year olds in England have since recovered. However, the Commission expressed concern that:

‘The gap in application and entry rates between the most and least privileged students has not narrowed substantially, and remains unacceptably wide. This is particularly true for the most selective institutions, with almost 10 times more privileged than disadvantaged students entering the 13 most selective institutions.’

2.4.2 Employment

One important measure of the transition to adult life is achieving economic independence through gainful employment; however the barriers to achieving this are rapidly growing. Fergusson (2013, p. 14) suggests that 'mass endemic youth unemployment is emerging as a characteristic of rich and poor economies alike'. The dramatic rise in youth unemployment internationally, particularly since the financial crisis began in 2007, is graphically illustrated in the most recent report from the International Labour Organisation (2012, p. 84), which states:

'Young people have suffered particularly heavily from the deterioration in labour market conditions. The rate of youth unemployment rose globally from 11.7 per cent in 2007 to 12.7 per cent in 2011, the advanced economies being particularly hard hit, where this rate jumped from 12.5 per cent to 17.9 per cent over this period.'

The situation in the UK mirrors the global picture. Lawy and Wheeler (2013), citing figures from the Office for National Statistics, state that by April 2012, there were more than one million unemployed sixteen to twenty-four year olds in the UK, representing more than one in five of that cohort (ONS 2012). There has been some improvement over time, with the most recent statistics for youth unemployment showing that 764,000 young people aged sixteen to twenty-four were unemployed in September to November 2014, which is 16.9% of this population (Mirza-Davies, 2015). It is not clear whether this decrease can be attributed to the impact of specific Government initiatives (these will be described shortly), to overall improvement in the economy, to other factors, or to

a combination of the above. However the figure still represents a very large number of young people, and of further concern is the high proportion of young people aged sixteen to twenty-four who were unemployed for over twelve months (206,000 people or 27% of the total) and therefore described as 'long term unemployed' (Mirza-Davies, 2015).

Chadderton and Colley (2012, p. 331) further point out the disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged, stating that according to an OECD report from 2008:

‘..the labour market was strongly polarised against lower-qualified youth, and that many young people were employed only in precarious, short-term jobs.’

In summary, the evidence suggests that for an economy which is currently the sixth largest in the world as measured by Gross Domestic Product (World Bank, 2014), the UK compares poorly with other advanced economies in enabling its young people to access education, employment and training. This was also acknowledged by the Coalition Government (2010-2015) in a report entitled ‘Building Engagement, Building Futures: Our Strategy to Maximise the Participation of 16-24 Year Olds in Education, Training and Work’ (HM Government, 2011, p. 14):

‘The UK continues to perform poorly compared to other OECD countries...we had the eighth highest rate of 15-19 year olds NEET at the beginning of 2009.’

2.4.3 Training

In terms of access to training, it is generally agreed that many other European countries have a history of offering much stronger systems of vocational preparation than is the case in Britain (Heinz, 1990; Bynner and Roberts, 1991; Evans, 2000). Comparisons are frequently made with for example, the robust system of apprenticeships which exists in Germany (Bynner, 2012). In Germany, around two-thirds of an age cohort undertakes an apprenticeship by the time they are twenty-five and in Denmark around a third do so (Wolf, 2011).

Hodgson and Spours (2012) reported that the Coalition Government (2010-2015) increased the supply of apprenticeships by 100,000, but only a minority involved sixteen to nineteen year olds. They expressed doubt about the extent to which these would improve employment opportunities for young people in the context of a depressed youth labour market.

The principle that reform to vocational education in the UK is sorely needed was acknowledged by the Coalition Government (2010-2015), in its acceptance of the recommendations of the Wolf Report (2011). Wolf argued that many vocational courses do not equip young people with the qualifications and employability skills for a successful pathway into higher education or employment, with the consequence that large numbers 'churn' back and forth between education and short term employment. She recommended that academic and vocational programmes should be genuinely 'fit for purpose', that better quality information should be provided about the options available, and

that the current system of vocational education in England should be dramatically simplified. The report sets out twenty-four specific recommendations to achieve these goals.

2.5 Policy responses in the UK

As outlined earlier, the problem of youth unemployment is a global one. Although there are some commonalities between the experiences of different countries, there are also complex differences (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007); therefore the discussion which follows will focus on the particular context and recent policy responses within the UK. It is also important to recognise that policy responses have differed across the four countries of the UK: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Bynner, 2001).

As outlined previously, during the 1990s concepts such as 'social exclusion'; 'disadvantage' and 'risk' increasingly came to influence Government policy and practice with regard to young people. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was set up by the Labour Government (1997-2001) with the expressed aims of addressing various aspects of social exclusion. The document *'Bridging the Gap'* contained proposals to reduce the large number of sixteen to eighteen year olds not in education, employment or training, and first coined the term 'NEET' to describe this group (SEU, 1999). An accompanying document, *Young People* (SEU, 2000) produced by the SEU's Policy Action Team 12 on disadvantaged young people, made two important recommendations which were subsequently translated into policy: the introduction of the educational

maintenance allowance (EMA) which gave families support to enable their young people to continue in education post-sixteen; and replacement of the statutory careers service with a national Connexions service, which had a broader remit to offer more holistic support for young people (Bynner, 2012).

In Scotland, the term 'in need of more choices and more chances' was preferred, with its more positive connotations of society's responsibility to such young people (Scottish Executive, 2006; Scottish Government, 2008).

With the change of UK government in 2010, there was a marked shift in England and Wales in the approach to young people, with arguably greater impact on those most disadvantaged. The Social Exclusion Task Force which had replaced the SEU was abolished; the EMA was replaced with a targeted 16-19 Bursary Fund for disadvantaged young people; and changes to the careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) system were implemented in 2012, with schools being made responsible for ensuring that young people have access to impartial and independent careers guidance (England and Wales. Statutes, 2012). The task of identifying and supporting those at risk of becoming NEET now falls largely on schools. The changes to CEIAG has been heavily criticised in some quarters; for example Langley, Hooley and Bertuchi (2014, p. v) suggest that 'while there are examples of good practice, there has been a substantial overall reduction in the quality and quantity of career education and guidance available to young people.'

Many commentators have also argued that general Government policies being pursued to reduce the budget deficit, such as lowering the 'bill' for welfare provision, further disadvantage young people who are NEET (Williams, 2011; Chadderton and Colley, 2012; Fergusson, 2013). It seems likely that similar policies will continue to be pursued by the 2015 Conservative Government.

Mirza-Davies (2014) outlines five main policies of the 2005-2010 Government aimed at reducing the number of young people who are NEET:

Table 2.2: Policies aimed at reducing the number of young people who are 'NEET'. Adapted from Mirza-Davies (2014)

Name of policy	Main features
Raising the Participation Age (RPA)	<p>The policy was initiated by the Labour Government (Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF, 2007) From 2013, young people in England are required to continue in education or training until they turn 17 and from 2015 they will be required to continue in education or training until the age of 18</p> <p>The definition of 'education' is flexible and includes being full-time at a school, college or at home; following an apprenticeship or part time education or training if the young person is employed, self-employed, or volunteering full time</p>
Youth contract	<p>The Youth Contract was a package of schemes aimed at helping young people into sustained employment, launched in April 2012 and combining existing schemes with new ones.</p> <p>Apprenticeship Grant for Employers of 16-24 year olds (AGE 16-24): Payments of £1,500 are available to employers with less than 1,000 employees that take on young apprentices.</p> <p>Work experience: Placements were available for 16-24 year olds, through Jobcentre Plus who have been claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) for at least 13 weeks.</p> <p>Support for 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET: Payments of £2,200 are made to providers who take on 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education, employment or training and who have low or no qualifications, and those from other disadvantaged backgrounds.</p> <p>Sector-based work academies: Some 18-24 old JSA claimants will be offered a mixture of training, work experience, and a job interview at a local firm through</p>

	<p>Jobcentre Plus.</p> <p>Extra support at Jobcentre Plus: 18-24 year old JSA claimants will be offered weekly rather fortnightly signing on meetings at the Jobcentre Plus.</p> <p>Funding for localised Youth Contracts: Localised Youth Contracts are available in Leeds City Region, Liverpool and Newcastle. The cities designed their own local schemes using national funding.</p>
Work Programme	Offers support to various groups of long-term unemployed people depending on their particular circumstances. Those aged 18-24 on JSA are referred to the programme after the 9-month point of their claim. Some claimants who are NEET are referred early to the Work Programme, after claiming for three months.
Apprenticeships	<p>Apprenticeships are paid jobs that incorporate on and off the job training. Successful apprentices receive a nationally recognised qualification on completion of their contract. The Government pays a proportion of the training costs for apprentices, depending on their age, with remaining training costs normally covered by the employer.</p> <p>Apprenticeship Grant as outlined above</p> <p>Access to Apprenticeships: People on the Access to Apprenticeship pathway are not employed as apprentices, but work towards elements of an apprenticeship framework. To be eligible individuals aged 16-24 must have been NEET for the whole of the preceding 13 weeks prior to joining the scheme.</p>
Mandatory Work Activity	Allows Jobcentre Plus advisors the authority to place JSA claimants on to "mandatory work activities" that will last four consecutive weeks for 30 hours per week.

The effectiveness of specific interventions aimed at reducing the NEET population is unclear. Government figures for apprenticeships state that 230,500 more people started apprenticeships in England than was the case in 2009/10 (510,200 in total) (Mirza-Davies, 2014). However, the small reduction in the NEET figures suggests that the majority of these new apprentices did not come from this group.

While the impact of RPA is yet to be established, many commentators are sceptical that this will bring about the desired improvements in access to

employment, particularly for the most disadvantaged (Maguire, 2013). However the RPA has highlighted the importance of ensuring that all young people remain engaged with learning. The Coalition Government (2010-2015) recognised this and produced 'Guidance on Raising the Participation Age (RPA)' (DfE, 2013) for LAs. This contains advice about promoting effective participation in education or training of young people in a local authority, identifying those that are not participating, and making appropriate arrangements for them.

2.6 Research evidence

As the preceding discussion has illustrated, all of the policies aimed at reducing the NEET population have been criticised, as being inadequate to deal with the scale of the problem, and as deeply flawed in terms of their underlying ideology and assumptions. There is a pressing need for robust research to explain the reasons why these initiatives have had a limited impact and to explore which approaches might be more effective. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has identified the transition from education to employment as a major challenge faced by young people and accordingly, its 'From Education to Employment' research has since 2009, been exploring evidence-based approaches that could help young people who are NEET. This research is on-going, but it has already identified some key features of the younger NEET population and important pointers to potentially effective interventions, as outlined below.

An NFER study commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) researched the characteristics and experiences of young people aged sixteen and seventeen who were NEET or who were in jobs without training (JWT) (Spielhofer et al, 2009a). This study provided a 'rich picture' of the views of young people and identified distinct groupings or segments within the sample. Two-fifths of those who were NEET expressed generally positive views about learning and were very likely to participate in education or training in the short-term. Another two-fifths faced personal and structural barriers and were likely to remain NEET in the medium-term. The final fifth were classified as 'undecided NEET' as although they did not face significant barriers to participating in education or training, they were dissatisfied with the available opportunities. The study concluded that different policy solutions are needed to engage or re-engage these disparate groups of young people. A further conclusion was that young people need better information, advice and guidance before leaving learning or while in jobs without training, to increase their awareness of the learning options available to them and enable them to make more informed choices. Finally it was suggested that the provision offered post-sixteen should be more appropriate and flexible for all young people in terms of content, delivery and timing.

This study, together with one conducted by the Audit Commission (2010) identified that the majority of young people who are NEET do *not* face multiple or complex barriers to engagement (such as teenage pregnancy or having social care involvement). An important suggestion is that young people could be prevented from becoming NEET if they are targeted with the right support early

on (Spielhofer et al, 2009a; Audit Commission, 2010). While the background context has radically changed since these studies were conducted, adopting a preventative approach continues to be a worthwhile goal.

Another NFER study carried out on behalf of the Local Government Association explored the value of using non-formal approaches to learning in order to re-engage young people who were NEET (Spielhofer, Marson-Smith and Evans, 2009b). Eight projects were visited and interviews were carried out with a group of staff, current participants, and young people who had previously taken part in the projects and had now moved on to education, training or employment. These interviews were used to identify seven key features of good practice in re-engaging young people who are NEET by means of non-formal learning approaches. These were:

- establishing effective partnerships with other organisations;
- employing skilled and motivated project staff;
- project activities which are tailored to young people's aspirations and needs;
- developing innovative activities and delivery approaches;
- having systems to monitor and evaluate provision regularly;
- developing formal and informal ways to recognise young people's achievements;
- supporting young people's transition to positive outcomes.

Returning to preventative strategies, a recent NFER project worked with schools and local authorities to develop a comprehensive list of 'hard'

(measurable) and 'soft' (attitudinal and personal) indicators of potential disengagement known as 'Risk Of NEET Indicators' or RONIs, which could be used in schools to identify young people at risk of disengaging before this has occurred (Southcott et al, 2013). The research followed an initial scoping study (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012) and gathered three forms of data: by means of a consultation panel; online and paper-based surveys with LA staff and school representatives; and telephone interviews with a sample of practitioners who responded to the survey.

The RONIs were grouped into six themes: factors associated with the structure/environment (such as gender, ethnicity and eligibility for free school meals); factors associated with level of attainment/educational needs; factors associated with local education services (such as not having access to transport or range of appropriate courses for sixteen to nineteen year olds); factors associated with personal/family circumstances; factors associated with attitude/aspirations; and factors associated with progression routes (such as being dissatisfied with available progression routes).

The factors included in the NFER 'checklist' were considered useful by school survey respondents. Collecting information about 'soft' indicators alongside 'hard' data was regarded as important to understand potential reasons for young people disengaging, by the majority of school and LA respondents (89% and 75% respectively).

Arnold and Baker (2012) explored the potential for developing a screening tool at a local level, using a small-scale approach, which will be described later.

Later in this chapter and also in Chapter Five, I discuss the ethical and practical concerns about schools attempting to identify risk factors for NEET in their students.

Further ongoing NFER research is examining the effectiveness of nine diverse school-based programmes designed to support students in Key Stage 4 who are 'at risk of temporary disconnection from learning' (Kettlewell et al, 2014; Stevens et al, 2014). Some of the initial findings emerging from the research suggest that key 'success factors' for such programmes include:

- ensuring that programmes are flexible and individually tailored for the young person;
- that relationships between staff and students are open and supportive;
- that efforts are made to broaden young people's horizons;
- that students do not feel stigmatised because they receive additional support; that there is full support and engagement at all levels of the organisation;
- that parents are engaged and supportive; and finally,
- that settings recognise the 'value-added' of involving an external partner.

The study underscores two themes which emerged from the earlier study by Spielhofer, Marson-Smith and Evans (2009b) - the importance of tailoring

programmes to the needs of the young people, and of having staff with the right skills to engage with them.

In summary, research studies such as those being carried out by NFER should help to develop our understanding of the diverse reasons for young people being at risk of, or becoming NEET, and of interventions that are the most effective, first at the preventative level, then in supporting those who have become NEET. However it is important to note that the NFER studies focus on younger people, i.e. those aged sixteen to nineteen who are at risk of NEET or who are NEET. It is not clear to what extent the research can be applied to those who are or who become NEET in the nineteen to twenty-four year age range, because the background context for them sees a shift from education to employment, and the factors influencing their NEET status may be very different. For example, the older group who are NEET may include more of those individuals who are long term unemployed.

2.7 Identifying useful psychological frameworks

This section considers three psychological frameworks which have informed this study. Chapter Five includes a detailed discussion of the relevance of each of the frameworks to the current study, with examples of how I have interpreted the findings through the lens of the three approaches.

2.7.1 A lifespan perspective

The first framework is based on psychological models of 'developmental stages'. These are concerned with the systematic changes in individuals that occur over the human lifespan, in response to the influence of biological maturation and learning. Such models generally focus on characteristics within the individual (such as identity, self-esteem, attributions, motivation and so on) and give relatively less weight to factors in the person's environment.

Early models by Hall (1904) and Erikson (1963) developed the concept of adolescence as an important phase of the life span. More recently Arnett (2000; 2006), a developmental psychologist, has suggested that a new phase of the lifespan is becoming evident in industrialised societies, which he defines as 'emerging adulthood' (roughly between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five). He describes this (2006, p. 119) as the lengthy period '...that now lies between the attainment of biological maturity and the entrance into stable adult roles.' According to Arnett, it is a time of instability and exploration, when young people explore various possible identities and lifestyles, and have more freedom and less social control than they did as adolescents or will as adults. Arnett cites research carried out in a number of European countries in support of his theory.

Bynner (2005, p. 378) is critical of the emphasis in Arnett's model on the individual's agency and freedom of choice in responding to particular sets of economic and social circumstances, and what he sees as a failure to recognise 'that the huge diversity of individual experience is constrained by location in the

social structure.’ He draws on the work of European sociologists such as Beck (1992), to argue that the concept of emerging adulthood should pay due attention to the structural influences and constraints in late modern western societies, which shape young people’s transitions, identities and roles. Cote and Bynner (2008) describe the exclusion processes in education and the workplace that prevent young people in some socio-economic contexts from experiencing the developmental processes presumed to be of benefit to all ‘emerging adults’.

2.7.1(i) Transitions

The concept of ‘transition’ remains an important one in life span perspectives.

The type of transition referred to here is:

‘the pathways that young people make as they leave school and encounter different labour market, housing and family situations as they progress towards adulthood.’ (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007, pp. 589-590).

The assumptions inherent in some depictions of transition have been widely questioned. Raffe (2003) describes three main assumptions; that pathways from one stage of life to the next are linear; are narrowly conceived in economic terms; and are largely dependent on individual agency. Furlong (2009b) traces how the concept of youth transition changed between the 1960s and 1990s, as pathways from adolescence to adulthood became increasingly diverse and complex. Researchers have also debated whether youth transitions in contemporary society are qualitatively different from those experienced by young people several decades ago (Stokes and Wyn, 2007), or whether they

share important continuities and similarities (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2007, 2009).

While some have questioned whether the concept of transition remains useful at all (Jeffs and Smith, 1998; Barry, 2005), many researchers advocate broadening the concept so that it can encompass the complexities of individual experience; such as how young people develop their identities, the multiple roles they adopt, and wider aspects of their lives. For example, Basit (2012) argues that class, gender and ethnicity are powerful factors that mediate young people's experiences of making the transition to adulthood. She conducted in-depth interviews with twenty minority ethnic young men and women aged between fourteen and twenty-four, at different stages of education, employment and non-employment. Basit (2012) identified that a complex range of ethnic and gendered experiences were described by the young people in the study, and cautions against stereotyping their beliefs and experiences.

Shildrick and McDonald (2007, p. 601) drawing upon their qualitative, longitudinal studies with 'socially excluded' young adults in Teesside, acknowledge the weaknesses of narrow models of transition, but conclude that the 'concept of transition—or something very like it—is a necessary heuristic with which to understand the making of young lives.' Their studies confirm the complexity and instability of transitions for disadvantaged young people:

'None of our research participants followed 'mainstream', orderly transitions, upwards and onwards to the neat accomplishment of adult

situations (although we suspect that, actually, some more comfortably situated young people may still achieve this)' (p. 599)

Shildrick and McDonald (2007) argue that transition studies should be more holistic, focusing on aspects of young people's lives such as leisure, health and sexuality alongside the 'traditional triumvirate' of school to work, family and housing transitions.

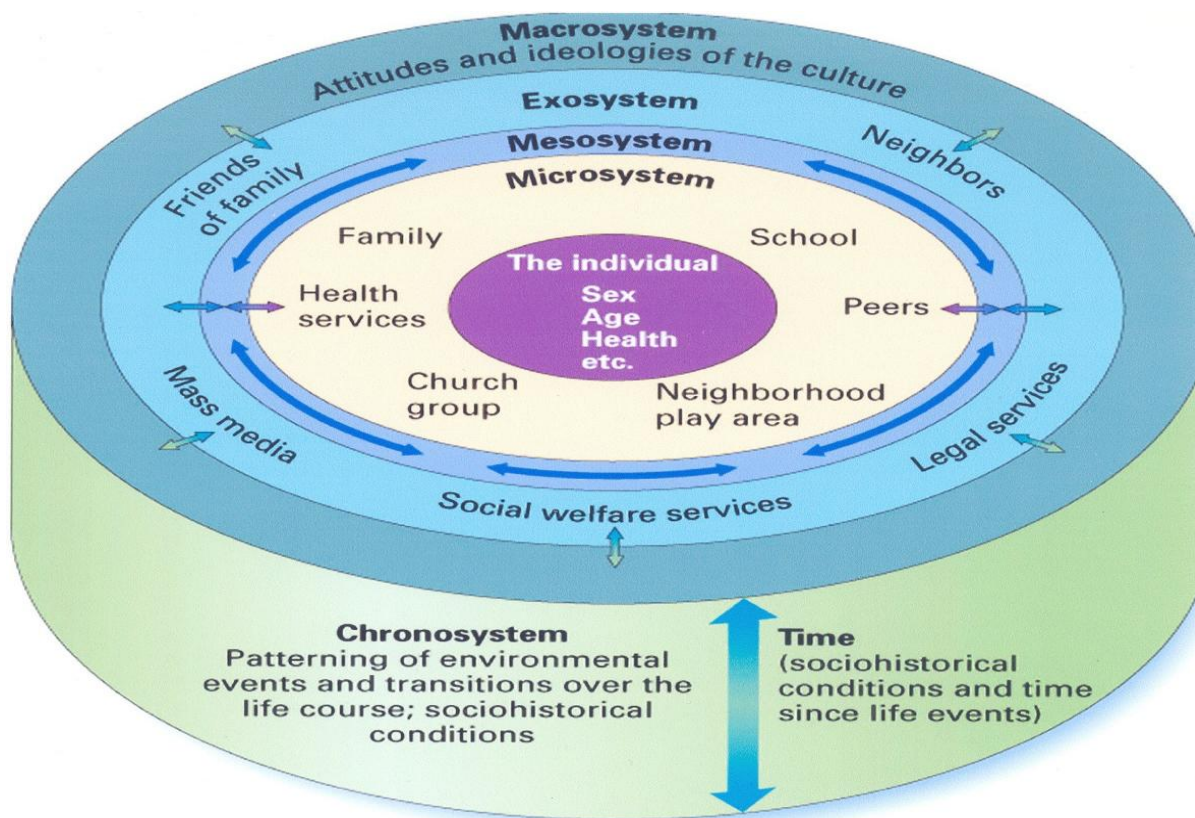
2.7.2 A systems perspective

Systems models of human behaviour place a much greater emphasis on the interaction between an individual and his/her environment, than is the case with life span approaches (Burnham, 1988; Dowling and Osborne, 2003). In Chapter One of *The Family and the school: a joint systems approach to problems with children*, edited by Dowling and Osborne (2003), Dowling (2003, p. 4) notes that a systemic perspective requires 'a move from the intrapsychic to the interpersonal level, from an individual to an interactionist view of behaviour.' Thus, a systems model would endeavour to understand the challenges of making the transition to adulthood, in terms of the influences of the young person's family, school, neighbourhood, and wider social structures, as well as 'within-person' factors such as attitudes, motivation and self esteem.

One of the best known and most influential systems models is the ecological systems model of human development by Bronfenbrenner (1979), which he subsequently refined to produce the bio-ecological theory of human development (2001), illustrated in Figure 2.1. The bio-ecological model regards

the drivers of human development as the interactions that occur between individuals (their biological being) and the interconnected systems surrounding them (their ecology). Bronfenbrenner (2001) highlights the importance of 'proximal processes' which refer to the active role an individual plays in her or his development, through engaging with other people, objects and symbols within her or his environment. Proximal processes are bidirectional in their influence, with the ecology changing the individual and vice-versa.

Figure 2.1: Visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development (2001)



Hodgson and Spours (2013) in their paper on finding ways to facilitate young people's transition from education to working life, develop a multi-level ecological model based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2001) theories, to aid understanding and positive intervention. They argue that the growing crisis of opportunity facing young people requires a new type of analysis of age 14+ Participation, Progression and Transition (PPT) in England. Hodgson and Spours (2013) identify a range of push/pull factors at the international and national levels, such as economic downturns and education policy, which in turn impact upon practices at the lower local levels where providers and curricula operate to support 14+ PPT.

Hodgson and Spours (2013) suggest therefore that the fundamental level of analysis and also intervention is the 'local learning ecology' or LLE. They outline the features of two types of 14+ LLE. In the first, described as 'low opportunity progression equilibria' (LOPE) they argue that the levels in the system interact in such a way as to diminish opportunities for 14+ PPT. By contrast in 'high opportunity progression eco-systems' (HOPE) the levels in the system interact in such a way that is more likely to benefit all young people in a locality, including those most disadvantaged. The model seems to offer the necessary complexity to capture 'the complex dynamics of the local area and educational and economic systems that education professionals and other social partners operate within and that young people navigate' (p. 215). However as the authors acknowledge, the model needs testing more widely. An extract of the model is shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Extract from the ecological framework of analysis for 14+ participation, progression and transition (PPT) by Hodgson and Spours (2013)

Levels of ecological framework	LLE as LOPE	LLE as HOPE
Micro – learner in her/his immediate environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners' interaction with their families, the classroom and their immediate community settings • Arena of influence on learning identities, personal motivation and personal progression trajectories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate social and cultural factors have negative impact on aspirations and attainment and perceptions of opportunity • Poor relationships between learners and teachers and mismatch of home and school environments • Narrow set of learning experiences • Early failure restricts progression opportunities • Feelings of lack of personal agency and control in relation to education • Personal trajectories fractured or not clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High learner support from families and community • Relationship with wider environment mediated by families and professionals • Broad and relevant curriculum • Wide set of experiences provided by a range of professionals • Experience of educational success • Feelings of high levels of agency and control • Perception that opportunities will come as reward for effort • Next steps clear, combined with general confidence in the future

2.7.2(i) 'Resilience' versus 'risk'

The concepts of 'risk' and 'resilience' are considered within the systems perspective because overall they describe an interactive process between the individual and different systems within his/her environment. Risk and resilience are also terms which can usefully be applied to communities.

As referred to earlier, becoming NEET is associated with a range of risk factors. In addition to the NFER research underway at a national level, the study in a specific local authority by Arnold and Baker (2012), developed a screening tool

which they argue, is able to identify young people at risk of entering NEET status, while they are still at school. In common with other researchers, (Wilson et al, 2008; Audit Commission 2010) Arnold and Baker (2012) found that risk factors were cumulative and additive for young people, and suggested that the cumulative method could be used to identify young people whose situations would not meet criteria for involvement from individual agencies, but who might need support due to a combination of factors.

As Arnold and Baker (2012) acknowledge, there are ethical concerns to consider in developing such screening tools, in particular the potential invasion of young people's privacy arising from collecting a raft of additional data about their lives. They argue that using a screening tool is justifiable given the poor outcomes associated with being NEET, but more thought should be given to addressing ethical aspects of this development work. Furthermore, while a screening tool might have a useful role to play as part of a strategy for preventing young people from becoming NEET, a more pressing issue currently is where the support for such young people would come from. Since Arnold and Baker (2012) conducted their research, the duty to provide independent careers guidance has been moved from LAs to schools. This had a significant impact on Connexions services, which lost their universal remit and as a result, reduced in size or disappeared altogether. One implication is that agencies might become very adept at collecting large amounts of information about young people and identifying who is at risk of NEET, but without there being the resources to provide support to those deemed to be in need of it.

The preoccupation with 'risk' is not without its critics. Turnbull and Spence (2011) in their analysis of key social policy documents, note that the concept of 'risk' has proliferated in social policy and practice in the UK, particularly with regard to children and young people (young people who are NEET being a key focus of concern). They argue that further empirical study and scrutiny of this trend is needed, and question whether the construction of youth both 'at-risk' and 'as-risk' is a useful and effective way of driving policy and practice interventions, as the extract below illustrates:

'Turning childhood and youth into a risk management project not only turns growing up into a problem to be solved but also reflects a society that fears its own future, constructing young people only in terms of their potential negative impact. What are the implications for both young people and for society if a 'positive outcome' comes at the cost of turning an increasingly large population into 'permanent suspects' subject to surveillance, stigmatisation and preventative intervention?' (p. 956)

The research on NEET status has to date been largely concerned with elucidating risk factors and relatively less attention has been given to identifying resilience factors. Schoon and Bynner (2003) argue that 'youth research needs to pay at least as much attention to the development of competences, resources, skills, and assets as to the emergence of disadvantage and risk' (p. 21). The definition of resilience used here is that by Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000), which describes it as a dynamic developmental process involving the interaction of personal attributes with environmental circumstances. Masten (2001) emphasises that resiliency is a part of normal development and therefore can be fostered in all individuals, to enable them to cope better with stressful circumstances.

Much research has been concerned with identifying protective factors which could mitigate the effect of adverse life circumstances (Rutter, 1987; Masten, Best and Garmezy, 1990; Werner and Smith, 1992; Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000; Luthar, 2006; Rutter, 2007). Three broad sets of variables have been identified: attributes of the individuals themselves (such as easy temperament and self belief); characteristics of their social environment, especially family (such as family warmth, cohesion, emotional support and positive styles of attachment); and environmental protective factors outside the family (such as positive school experiences and relationships with a caring adult). A number of studies have highlighted the important protective factor of mentoring or support for a young person from an adult outside the family (Phillips, 2010; DuBois et al, 2011; Sheehy, Kumrai and Woodhead, 2011).

2.7.3 Self-determination theory

The third theory which offers relevant insights to this study is self-determination theory (SDT). Its strengths lie in its consideration of the impacts of social environments on a person's motivation, affect, behaviour and well-being, and in the range of contexts in which it has been applied (Deci and Ryan, 2008a, 2008b). SDT is essentially a theory of human motivation. Svinicki and Vogler (2012, p. 2336) define 'motivation' as follows:

'In the broadest sense, motivation is used to explain the increase or decrease in the frequency and/or intensity of an individual's goal-seeking behavior. It has been described as both a quality of an individual and a result of the individual's interactions with the situation.'

Svinicki and Vogler (2012) state that modern research and theory on motivation have moved away from a model that is focused on a *deficit* of some desired situation (for example, needs theories were based on deficits in the psychological/social balance of the individual), to a model that places its emphasis on how the individual *interprets* the situation. Modern theories therefore recognise that what is motivating to one person might not be motivating to another. Svinicki and Vogler (2012) suggest that the five theories which are currently the most helpful in understanding motivation are: attribution theory, expectancy value theory, self-efficacy theory, achievement goal orientation theory, and SDT.

SDT was first comprehensively described by Deci and Ryan (1985) and over the past thirty years a sizeable body of research has explored its applications across many aspects of life; for example, education, parenting, work, sport, and psychotherapy. Its proponents argue that the theory has demonstrated heuristic power as a tool for helping to understand a variety of basic psychological processes such as personality development, self-regulation, and life goals.

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) argue that human beings have three fundamental and co-existing needs in order to develop and thrive: to feel related, competent and autonomous. These needs are hypothesised to be universal and innate, based on research carried out in a variety of countries (Sheldon et al, 2004; Ryan et al, 2005). Relatedness describes the need for human connection, which according to Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 231) is 'to love and to care, and to

be loved and cared for', and according to Andersen, Chen and Carter (2000, p. 270), involves 'tenderness, warmth, emotional responsiveness and acceptance.'

The concept of competence in SDT draws heavily on the work of White (1959), who argued that competence should be viewed in a broad biological sense as an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment. White proposed that in human beings, competence satisfies an intrinsic need to deal with the environment and it develops through learning. He also suggested that competence should be regarded as a motivational concept because it is directed, selective and persistent. Harter has worked on refining and extending White's formulation in order to explore it empirically (1981). She developed a self-report scale to tap into children's intrinsic versus extrinsic orientation toward learning and mastery in the classroom, which she argues (p. 311) is 'highly predictive of the child's sense of competence in the classroom'.

The third element of the model concerns autonomy. Deci and Ryan (2008a, p. 15) state that 'autonomy means to act volitionally, with a sense of choice.' Van Petegem et al (2012) define autonomy as volitional, or *self-endorsed*, functioning which is the converse of pressured or controlled functioning.

Unlike traditional theories of motivation, SDT distinguishes between *types* of motivation rather than regarding motivation as a unitary concept. Deci and Ryan (2008b) identify these as *autonomous motivation*, *controlled motivation* and *amotivation*. Autonomous motivation arises when a person experiences both

intrinsic motivation for something, and extrinsic motivation that arises from the person identifying with the value of the activity. As a result, the person experiences self-endorsement of his or her actions, known as *volition*. Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 70) define 'intrinsic motivation as 'the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn.' Where individuals have intrinsic motivation, they do things for the inherent satisfaction provided by the activity. In contrast extrinsic motivation describes individuals doing things because they perceive them to have some value apart from the inherent satisfaction. Ryan and Deci (2000) give the example of students doing their homework because they enjoy it (intrinsic motivation); because they see that this will help them in their chosen career; or because their parents have made them do it. The latter two are examples of extrinsic motivation, but the first involves a greater degree of autonomy, where the students exercise choice and personally endorse their actions, while the second involves compliance with external demands.

Controlled motivation is the antithesis of autonomous motivation, since a person's motivation arises from external regulation such as the application of rewards or punishments, combined with 'introjected regulation' where the person has internalised the pressure to think, feel or behave in particular ways. Both autonomous and controlled motivation have an energising and directive effect on behaviour. Amotivation however describes a lack of intention and motivation.

A key question for any theory is how applicable it is to different aspects of human life. Further key questions concern how the three types of motivation differ, what effects they have and if/how they can be influenced.

As outlined earlier, the theory has been tested across diverse aspects of human experience using a range of methodologies and the core motivational processes have been found to be the same. Numerous research studies have shown that autonomous motivation has more beneficial outcomes for individuals than controlled motivation, including greater psychological health (for example better outcomes from psychotherapy in a study by Zuroff et al, 2007), more effective performance (for example better grades in a study by Black and Deci, 2000) and greater persistence in the long term (for example at school, Pelletier et al, 2001). This research clearly demonstrates the influence on a person's motivation of a person's environment and particularly his/her interpersonal relationships, which is of fundamental interest to those who work with children and young people.

Three areas of the self-determination research seem particularly pertinent to the experiences of young people who are or who have been NEET. These are the research on the role of parents, and schools, in encouraging children and young people to develop autonomous motivation; and the role of managers in encouraging autonomous motivation in the workplace. Each is considered in turn.

2.7.3(i) Parental autonomy support

Along with many other branches of psychology, SDT places great emphasis on the crucial role of parents in shaping their children's identity and sense of self. Joussemet, Landry and Koestner (2008) state that the active support of the child's capacity to be self-initiating and autonomous, is one of the three key components of successful parenting (the others being involvement and structure). The converse of autonomy support is psychological control, which it is argued, is not conducive to healthy development because it undermines the child's ability to internalise social rules and to develop self-regulation.

The Joussemet, Landry and Koestner (2008) paper reports on three areas of investigation: studies that used observational methods to measure parental behaviour (focusing on very young children), studies that used parental interviews (these have focused on school-age children) and finally, studies that assessed perceptions of parental behaviour as reported by their children (these have mainly involved teenagers and young adults). This review focuses only on the research with adolescents and young adults (Soenens and Vansteenkiste, 2005; Niemiec et al, 2006), as these are particularly relevant to my study, while acknowledging that experiences in early and later childhood undoubtedly influence an individual's later development.

Questionnaires are frequently used to explore the perceptions of adolescents and college students about parental influence. Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2005) used the Perception of Parents Scales (POPS; Grolnick, Ryan and Deci,

1991) to explore the views of a large sample of Dutch adolescents with regard to parental autonomy support. This was defined as the extent to which their parents encouraged them to pursue their own interests and values. The scale consisted of five items; for example “My mother/father, whenever possible, allows me to choose what to do.” Items were scored on 5-point Likert scales, ranging from 1, ‘*strongly disagree*’, to 5, ‘*strongly agree*’. The results showed that autonomy-supportive parenting was significantly related to self-determination in all life domains. Similar results have been obtained with college students (Niemic et al, 2006). Other research has suggested that parental autonomy support is especially helpful to children as they make stressful school transitions (Grolnick et al, 2000).

2.7.3(ii) Autonomy support in education

Guay, Ratelle and Chanal (2008) provide a useful review of education studies that have been guided by SDT. They reported at the time that over two hundred studies had been carried out, indicating that SDT is widely regarded as valid and useful in the sphere of education. Guay, Ratelle and Chanal (2008, p. 237) conclude that ‘overall, results of the reviewed studies provide support for SDT’s central proposals in the education realm’, but recommend that further research is needed in areas such as carrying out studies on the relationships between types of motivation; longitudinal studies to better determine how variables are related; research into the role of friends; investigating whether having autonomous motivation exerts a ‘protective’ effect which enables an individual to cope with a controlling environment; and more studies on the impact of

interventions to modify teaching approaches so that they are more autonomy-supportive.

Niemiec and Ryan (2009) argue that all too often educators employ external controls in educational settings to ensure that learning occurs, which they attribute to pressures on teachers to achieve results, and the application of traditional behavioural approaches to learning. Niemiec and Ryan (2009, p. 134) suggest that anxiety, boredom and alienation are frequently the consequences of such approaches, followed by 'the self-fulfilling prophecy so evident in many classrooms, whereby students no longer are interested in what is taught, and teachers must externally control students to 'make' learning occur.' They suggest a range of strategies based on SDT for teachers to foster a sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness in their students. These will be considered in Chapter Five.

The research by Vallerand, Fortier and Guay (1997) is an important example of applying a theoretical motivational model to the 'real life' problem of young people dropping out of school. Vallerand and his colleagues proposed that there were four stages in the sequential process leading up to the young person dropping out. In the first stage, it was hypothesised that students' sense of personal autonomy and competence was undermined if key figures (parents, teachers and the school administration) provided low levels of 'autonomy supportive' behaviours (such as telling students what to do and how to do it without regard for their views and choices). Secondly, the students' poor perceptions of their personal competence and autonomy reduced their self-

determined motivation. Thirdly, these low levels of self-determined motivation led students to develop intentions to drop out of school. Finally the students acted on these intentions when it became possible to do so.

The model was tested with a large cohort of students with a mean age of nearly fifteen, in the ninth and tenth grades in Canadian high schools (Vallerand, Fortier and Guay, 1997). They were asked to complete three scales that assessed their perceptions of the autonomy support provided by parents, teachers and the school administration. A year later, the researchers contacted the Quebec Ministry of Education to identify students who had not re-enrolled in any high school in the province. From this information, the researchers were then able to identify true dropouts with the schools that originally took part in the study. Responses to the questionnaire were then compared.

The dropout rate in the study was 6%, and included a higher percentage of males than females. The results provided strong evidence for the model put forward. Compared with the 'persistent' students, those who dropped out, showed lower levels of intrinsic motivation, perceived themselves to be less competent and autonomous, and perceived their parents, teachers and the school administration as less autonomy-supportive.

The study by Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2005) described earlier, explored adolescents' perceptions of the learning climate in their school, as well as their perceptions of their parents. The Learning Climate Questionnaire was used (Williams and Deci, 1996) and participants were asked to rate the items with

respect to the autonomy-support of the teachers in general. An example of the six items was “I feel that my teachers provide me choices and options.” The results showed that teaching perceived by the young people to be autonomy-supportive, added significantly to the prediction of self-determination in the domains of school and job-seeking behaviours.

Wilding (2015) discusses the potential for EPs to apply SDT systemically in schools to support students who are disaffected. Since there is likely to be a degree of overlap between such students and those who are at risk of becoming NEET, I further explore her ideas in Chapter Five.

2.7.3(iii) Autonomy support in the workplace

Deci and Ryan (2008a) in their overview of autonomy support in the workplace, argue that as is the case for parents and educators, there are benefits in providing an autonomy-supportive environment. In relation to employment, these benefits are manifested in employees’ increased performance and enhanced adjustment, persistence and creativity.

A longitudinal study by Wandeler and Bundick (2011) is of interest to my research because it specifically examined the perceptions of young vocational trainees in the workplace. The study explored the relationship between hope and SDT, in order to examine how certain characteristics of workplaces relate to levels of hope. The researchers draw parallels between the basic premises of hope theory and SDT; for example both assume that people have inherent

growth tendencies, self-motivation and are intrinsically goal-directed; and both view similar social environments as beneficial for favourable development. At the same point over three successive years of their training, the trainees were asked to complete questionnaires to measure their perceptions of hope, relatedness, autonomy and competence. The findings suggested that there was a positive reciprocal feedback process between hope and the satisfaction of the need for competency. Interrelationships were identified between hope and autonomy and hope and relatedness, but these were not statistically significant. Wandeler and Bundick (2011, p. 352) concluded that 'Trainers can foster hope and autonomous motivation through autonomy-supportive behavior, displaying confidence in trainees' abilities, and by modeling hopeful thinking and behavior.'

Finally, Kenny et al (2010) presented promising research suggesting the potential for work-based learning at school to promote motivation, school engagement and thereby academic achievement, particularly in groups of young people at risk of school failure. In their study, 201 high school students completed measures of work hope, autonomy support, and achievement beliefs. These measures drew on expectancy value, hope, and self-determination theories. The results confirmed 'the expected relationship between positive, hopeful and planful views towards one's vocational future and a valuing of current educational experiences and feelings of competence in those activities' (p. 211). Kenny et al (2010) suggest that although the theoretical motivational processes underlying this need clarification, work-based programmes may be an important means to enable young people to set goals and gain confidence and competence in working towards these, and are

therefore likely to be beneficial and linked to positive achievement-related beliefs.

2.8 Summary

The aims of this chapter have been threefold. First, I have traced the complex background to young people being or becoming NEET, by describing key features of the changes in education, employment and training which impact on young people as they move into adulthood. As unique sets of circumstances contribute to the experiences of NEET in different countries, I focus mainly on the UK and specifically England. The second aim has been to critique the concept of 'NEET', of how young people in this situation are represented, and of many of the policy responses.

Finally I have explored aspects of three psychological theories which have informed the current research: the concept of 'transition' as part of a lifespan perspective; eco-systemic theory, which emphasises the interaction between the individual and various levels of his or her environment, and within this a discussion of risk and resilience; and finally, SDT which is also interactionist in its perspective, but pays particular attention to the role of the environment in influencing an individual's sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness and in turn his or her motivation.

In summary, the background literature has influenced the direction of this study in the following respects. First, I wanted to place the perspectives and

experiences of young people who had been NEET at the centre of the study, as much of the literature especially from policy makers, even if it recognises that those who are NEET are a heterogeneous group, tends to make generalisations about young people in this situation. A few studies set out to capture individual viewpoints of those who are NEET but as even these researchers themselves acknowledge, such young people can be 'hard to reach' and to engage with, and their views and voices are therefore not well represented. In view of the evident stigma attached to the NEET label in the literature, I was interested to explore how young people viewed themselves, and thought they might have been viewed by others in their community and wider society when they were NEET.

Second, in contrast to a frequent 'within-person' perspective in the literature, which regards young people who are or who may be NEET as a 'problem' requiring interventions to rectify their perceived deficits, I was interested to explore with a group of young people and with adults who work with young people, the features of the young people's social and educational environment which were supportive or unsupportive to navigating this life experience. I then endeavoured to link these findings to psychological theories which seemed to offer useful and relevant explanations for the phenomena observed. From this small study, a number of issues emerged which were reflected in the literature, suggesting that they might be relevant considerations for young people more widely who might find themselves in a similar situation.

Finally, by focusing on the environment surrounding the young person, I hoped to generate some suggestions for improving practice in education and training settings, to better prepare young people for the transition to adult life and to provide the optimum support for those who experience a period of NEET. I also consider the potential role of educational psychologists in directly working with young people who are NEET, or advising adults who support them.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the rationale for the methodology and methods I used for my study. Gray (2009, p.578) defines methodology as ‘the analysis of and the broad philosophical and theoretical justification for a particular method used in research.’ The methodology can therefore be characterised as the *strategy or plan of action* for conducting the research, carefully informed by its underpinning theoretical perspective and epistemology.

The methodology in turn informs the research methods to be employed in the study. These comprise the procedures or techniques to gather and analyse the data and should be defined and thought through as specifically as possible.

The broad aims of this study were as follows:

- To investigate young people’s perceptions of the time when they were NEET, compared with their perceptions of their current situation, having moved on in their lives.

- To explore implications for the role of EPs (if any) in working with young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or who are NEET

3.2 Research questions

I developed a set of detailed research questions on the basis of my broad research aims, and following a review of the relevant literature as discussed in Chapter Two:

1. What perceptions do young people have looking back, about their experiences of being 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET)?
2. How do young people's perceptions about being NEET compare with their perceptions now that they have moved on to education, employment or training (EET)?
3. What supportive factors at different levels (self, family, wider community) do young people identify which enabled them to manage their situation and/or move out of being NEET?
4. What barriers do young people identify which hindered them from managing their situation and/or moving out of being NEET?
5. In the experience of adults supporting young people who are or who have been NEET, what factors help such young people to achieve successful outcomes, or hinder them from doing so?

The first part of the chapter sets out some of the key issues addressed during the planning phase, before the study was carried out. These include the ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpin my research (3.3); the reasoning behind selecting thematic analysis rather than other qualitative approaches for analysing the data (3.4.1 to 3.4.5); a discussion of my stance on questions concerning the validity, reliability and generalisation of the study (3.4.6); and finally, a discussion regarding the potential ethical considerations of the study (3.4.7). I then describe the methodological issues addressed during the implementation phase of the study; including how I selected my participants (3.5.1); how I designed my method of data collection (a semi-structured interview – 3.5.2); how I carried out an initial pilot (3.5.3), and decisions made about the setting in which the interviews took place (3.5.4). The final part of the chapter outlines how the data gathered were analysed (3.6 to 3.7).

3.3 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

The fundamental question all researchers of human behaviour must consider is how their view of the world and their view of knowledge will determine every aspect of their research. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 5) suggest that research is essentially concerned with:

‘understanding the world; this is informed by how we view our world (s), what we take understanding to be, and what we see as the purposes of understanding.’

However arriving at a clear picture of what this looks like in practice, is very difficult, due to the lack in social science research of a unified conceptual map with agreed understandings and definitions of the components which contribute to research. Instead, the field is characterised by disagreements, overlapping definitions and confusing inconsistencies, some of which will be highlighted in this chapter. Nudzor (2009, p. 115) summarises the problems thus:

‘More often, these methodologies and methods are not defined consistently and in an orderly fashion, and their philosophical underpinnings (that is, how these methodologies and methods relate to larger theoretical ideas) are left unclear. To add to the confusion, one frequently finds the same methodological or philosophical terminologies used in the research literature in a number of different, sometimes contradictory, ways...’

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p. 21) argue that the assumptions of the researcher will determine each subsequent stage in the research. Thus, ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions, which in turn give rise to methodological considerations and finally to the methods employed in the research.

Ontology is a term derived from the Greek word *onto*, meaning ‘the study of that which is’. It describes the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence or reality and concerns what exists, what is the nature of the world and what is reality. Willig (2008a, p. 13) defines ontology and distinguishes it from epistemology as follows:

‘Ontology is concerned with the nature of the world. While epistemology asks ‘How can we know?’, the question driving ontology is ‘What is there to know?’

Burrell and Morgan (1979) point out that all researchers will hold explicit and implicit assumptions about the very nature or essence of the social phenomena they are investigating. In their analysis they distinguish between the realist position, which states that social reality is a given ‘out there’ which exists independently of individuals, and the nominalist position, which argues that social reality is a product of individual minds. Willig (2008a) uses the terminology of ‘realist’ versus ‘relativist’ to contrast these two ontological positions.

Epistemology is derived from the Greek word ‘*episteme*’ and means ‘the study of knowledge’. It refers to the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope (limitations) of knowledge. Willig (2008a, p. 2) provides an accessible definition:

‘It attempts to provide answers to the question, ‘How, and what, can we know?’ This involves thinking about the nature of knowledge itself, about its scope and about the reliability and validity of claims to knowledge.’

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 7) argue that ‘the researcher’s assumptions about the nature of knowledge will profoundly affect how they go about uncovering knowledge of social behaviour.’

Many writers have argued that research in the social sciences is characterised by two competing philosophical traditions which hold essentially opposing theoretical perspectives on the nature of enquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Carr, 1995; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Charmaz, 2008). Robson (2002, p.18) describes these two approaches as follows:

‘One is variously labelled as positivistic, natural science-based, hypothetico-deductive or even simply ‘scientific’; the other as interpretive, ethnographic or qualitative – among several other labels.’

In this thesis the term ‘positivism’ will be used to denote the first tradition outlined above by Robson. Charmaz (2008, pp. 83-84) defines positivism as:

‘the assumption of a unitary scientific method of observation, experimentation, logic and evidence...Positivistic methods assumed an unbiased and passive observer, the separation of fact from value, the existence of an external world separate from scientific observers and their methods, and the accumulation of knowledge about this world.’

Other theories of knowledge under the umbrella of positivism are empiricism and hypothetico-deductivism. According to Willig (2008a), empiricism assumes that the perceptions of our senses must provide the basis for acquiring knowledge, and hypothetico-deductivism assumes that scientific research is based on generating hypotheses which can be tested in practice by looking for evidence which disconfirms them.

The alternative tradition of enquiry is interpretivism. According to Thomas (2009, p. 75), in this tradition the social world:

‘...is *not* straightforwardly perceivable because it is **constructed** by each of us in a different way. It is not simply ‘out there’; it is different for each of us, with words and events carrying different meanings in every case. It cannot therefore be adequately studied using the methods of physics and chemistry, with talk of variables and quantification: an entirely different mindset and set of procedures is needed to inquire into it.’

A further fundamental aspect of interpretivism concerns the position of the researcher. Thomas (2009) points out that this approach involves looking closely at what people are doing, by using our own selves and our own knowledge of the world as people, and acknowledging how our subjective position affects our interpretation of what we observe.

Willig (2008a) argues that most researchers now accept that our view of the world cannot be wholly objective, as we necessarily filter it through subjective experience. However researchers differ in the degree to which they believe that our understanding of the world is able to reflect objective reality, adopting a range of positions along a continuum from naive realism at the ‘positivist’ pole through to critical realism; versions of social constructionism; and finally to extreme relativism at the opposite pole.

Critical realism, according to Easton (2010, p. 120) proposes ‘an ontology that assumes that there exists a reality “out there” independent of observers’, while at the same time accepting that reality is partly socially constructed. It is essentially a pragmatic approach which recognises that the nature of reality is always an open question, and therefore critical realists are content to

investigate events or outcomes in terms of the external and visible behaviours of people, systems and things as they occur or as they have happened.

Frost (2011, p. 147) defines social constructionism as an approach where 'unique realities are created by individuals through their interactions with others.' All human experience is mediated by the pertaining historical, cultural and linguistic context, and therefore can never reflect some absolute truth or reality (Willig, 2008b). Burr (2003) comments that there is no single description of social constructionism - the term covers a family of post-modern theoretical approaches to studying human experience, which share features in common. These features are: adopting a critical stance towards 'taken-for-granted' knowledge, recognising that our understandings of the world are historically and culturally specific, recognising that knowledge is constructed through social interactions, with a particular emphasis on the importance of language, and finally, recognising that different understandings of the world give rise to different kinds of social action.

Pring (2000) acknowledges that there are distinctions between positivism and interpretivism, but he accuses researchers of failing to recognise the complexity of enquiry and instead creating what he calls a 'false dualism' between quantitative and qualitative modes of research, where the outer world of publicly accessible things and the inner world of thoughts and meanings are treated as fundamentally different.

Pring (2000, p. 53) suggests that both approaches to enquiry are valid and share common features, therefore to polarise them has distorted the debate:

‘My argument has been that, in the ways in which both physical and social realities are conceptualized, the very possibility of the negotiation of meanings presupposed the existence of things (including ‘person things’). These things must have certain distinguishing features which make possible our different constructions of the world.’

A further confusion arises from the widespread tendency to describe studies from the positivist tradition as ‘quantitative’ and those from the interpretive tradition as ‘qualitative’. This is misleading, for as Robson (2002, p. 6) points out, the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches are ‘more apparent than real’, and adopting a multi-method stance involving the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, is perfectly possible.

In deciding on my epistemology and ontology for this study, I have concluded that rather than regarding positivism and interpretivism as competing and incompatible approaches, I would consider them to be relative positions at either end of a continuum, with the possibility of placing my study at some point along this continuum. This approach seems more pragmatic, particularly in view of the argument put forward by Willig (2008a) that a position of pure positivism is rarely adopted nowadays. This leaves the question of where the line is drawn between being essentially ‘positivist’ or ‘interpretivist’ in outlook. Some commentators have argued that the two stances are fundamentally incompatible (Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002), while other researchers argue that common ground can be found between positivism and interpretivism and

have advocated a third methodological approach known as ‘combined methods’ research (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). However this question lies beyond the scope of my study.

In conclusion, I argue that the theoretical perspective of my study is essentially interpretive, as my purpose is to understand an aspect of the subjective world of human experience, rather than aiming to develop universal rules of human behaviour through employing scientific methods, the latter being more closely aligned to a normative or positivist paradigm.

The underpinning epistemology of my study is social constructionism – I am assuming that the young people concerned, are actively making sense of the world through their experiences within it, and I also acknowledge that the perceptions of (more powerful) others (for example, those who apply the label ‘NEET’ and assumptions that may go with this), may influence or determine how they see themselves.

3.4 Research Design:

3.4.1 Rationale for choice of qualitative method

The four qualitative approaches I considered using for my study were thematic analysis, discourse analysis, narrative approaches, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). These are considered and discussed in turn,

and I outline my reasoning for deciding on thematic analysis in preference to the other three approaches.

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

The well known paper by Braun and Clarke (2006) has been highly influential in defining thematic analysis and providing a practical framework for how to do it.

They define thematic analysis as (p. 79):

‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail.’

There is some debate about whether thematic analysis should be regarded as a qualitative method in its own right. Boyatzis (1998, p. 4) suggests that thematic analysis is not a qualitative method, but rather a ‘process for encoding qualitative information.’ Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) however argue that thematic analysis should be ‘considered a method in its own right’, and in my view it offers a similar level of rigour of analysis to other qualitative methods which I investigated.

Braun and Clarke (2006) make a strong case for the overall flexibility of thematic analysis, stating that it can be utilised in various ways within many different theoretical approaches, because it is not locked into a specific pre-existing theoretical framework (such as IPA). For example, they argue that it can sit comfortably at various positions along the positivist-interpretivist

continuum described earlier. They also argue that it lends itself both to inductive or 'bottom-up' approaches to data analysis, and deductive, theory-driven approaches. However, as Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight, there are disadvantages to thematic analysis, including its limited ability to convey a sense of continuities and discontinuities in an individual's story, or to convey the complexities of a person's discourse, and the difficulty it can present for the researcher in deciding what aspect of his or her data to focus on.

My study was an exploratory, small scale, retrospective study, and the data gathered were primarily qualitative. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) state that the defining features of an exploratory study, are that the researcher carefully reads and rereads the data, looking for key words, trends, themes, or ideas in the data that will help outline the analysis, before any analysis takes place. My research questions were primarily descriptive in that they aimed to identify dimensions of the issue (de Vaus, 2001), and I anticipated focusing on the explicit or surface meanings of what the young people said, which Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as a focus at the 'semantic' level rather than at the 'latent' level.

I intended to employ an inductive approach to carry out my initial analysis of the data, which would entail coding the data without imposing a pre-existing coding or theoretical frame beforehand. I then planned to explore the data from the perspective of key themes which I had identified in the literature, which fits a deductive approach. Thematic analysis therefore seemed the most appropriate approach because it did not restrict the way in which questions were framed

prior to and during the interview, and allowed maximum flexibility at the analysis stage in allowing themes to be derived from the young people's accounts. I concluded that using the Braun and Clarke (2006) framework would offer the best structure for capturing the themes emerging from my conversations with the young people.

3.4.3 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis highlights the central role of language in the construction of social reality and the achievement of social objectives (Willig, 2008a). The two main versions of discourse analysis are discursive psychology, as introduced by Potter and Wetherell in 1987, and Foucauldian discourse analysis, based on the work of Foucault. Both are social constructionist approaches as they argue that in order to make sense of what people say, it is essential to take account of the social context in which they speak. Discursive psychology envisages that speakers are active agents who use discourse as a tool to serve a variety of functions and consequences. Foucauldian discourse analysis however states that discourses facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when (Parker, 1992). It places much more emphasis on the wider social and historical context within which discourses take place, and the way in which some discourses become dominant and legitimise existing power relations and social structures (Willig, 2008b).

I was interested in how the young people in my study would talk about their experiences and the main strength of discourse analysis is its emphasis on the

central role of language. Both versions of discourse analysis have the advantage of offering a clear process for analysing the data, such as the ten stage process set out by Potter and Wetherell (1987) for conducting a discursive psychology analysis. I concluded however that discourse analysis would not be the most suitable approach because my focus was broader than the young people's language. I was interested in wider issues such as the impact of being NEET on the young people's sense of self (for example, their motivation, resilience, and personal identity).

3.4.4 Narrative research

Murray (2008, p. 113) states that according to narrative theory, 'we are born into a storied world and we live our lives through the creation and exchange of narratives.' He describes the principal method of collecting such narratives as being via a 'life-story interview' where the participant gives a detailed account of a particular experience. Typically the narrative interview is very open-ended and the researcher refrains from contributing comments and questions so as not to interrupt the flow of the narrative. Analysis of such interviews is concerned with taking the whole account in order to explore how it is structured and to connect it to the wider context.

When I was planning my study I was attracted to some of the key features of a narrative approach. First, it involves the concepts of organising experience in order to make sense and find meaning in one's everyday life, particularly when a person's life has been disrupted in some way; all of which seemed highly

relevant in the case of young people who had experienced a period of NEET. Second, there is a strong temporal quality to narratives, for example the classic 'beginning, middle and end' structure to most stories, which endorsed my intention to ask young people to reflect on different points in time in their lives (however in the order 'now', 'then' and 'the future', for reasons which I explain later in the chapter). Third, the narrative approach places a strong emphasis on the narrator being an active agent in constructing his or her story, and the researcher actively bringing his or her own ideas to the narrative, which were both ideas that I felt comfortable with, in relation to my research.

However after further consideration I ruled out using a narrative approach, because; I was concerned that a very open-ended interview question might not provide sufficient structure for young people to respond to; I wanted to ask more directive questions based on my review of the literature; and I was also concerned that if I conducted the number of interviews I anticipated, it would be difficult to transcribe them in the requisite detail (for example, capturing exclamations, pauses, emphases, tone of voice and so on, as advised by Murray, 2008).

3.4.5 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

This approach, developed by Smith in the 1990s, aims to explore how individuals perceive and make sense of the particular situations they are facing, but it explicitly recognises that the researcher's own view of the world and the interaction between researcher and participant will also have a fundamental

bearing on the analysis which emerges (Smith, 2004; Smith and Osborn, 2008, Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The most widely used method of data collection in IPA is the semi-structured interview, with care being taken to ask the participants open-ended and non-directive questions. The first stage of analysis involves reading and re-reading of the data, with the researcher producing notes to reflect his or her initial thoughts and observations. Stage two involves the researcher identifying and labelling conceptual themes which capture the essence of the text. In stage three, the researcher attempts to introduce more structure by constructing clusters of themes. Finally, the researcher produces a summary table of the themes, together with quotations that illustrate each theme (Willig, 2008a).

The advantages of using IPA as a research approach are that it offers an interpretive theoretical framework in keeping with my standpoint; it has a focus on the lived experience of the individuals in the study; it is accessible as it provides a systematic process of analysis and detailed descriptions of the analytic process; and it addresses the issue of the 'integral involvement' of the researcher.

I eventually decided not to utilise IPA for the following reasons. Primarily, I was concerned that the emphasis on my perspective as researcher might become too dominant, particularly as I intended that the study should be more open-ended and exploratory. I wanted to avoid consciously 'reading into' what the young people said, preferring if possible to allow their perspectives to emerge. Finally I also had reservations regarding the assumptions about language made

within IPA, that there is a straightforward relationship between what people say and their experience.

3.4.6 ‘Validity’, ‘reliability’ and ‘generalisation’

Yardley (2008) argues that the criteria used to evaluate the validity of quantitative research (objectivity, reliability and statistical generalisability) are not appropriate for evaluating qualitative research, and suggests that the core principles should be for the research to show sensitivity to the context; commitment and rigour; coherence and transparency; and to have the potential to have impact and importance. The reliability and generalisability of a qualitative study is also interpreted more cautiously, in that the researcher anticipates that the insights derived from studying a particular context might prove useful in other contexts that are similar. Table 3.1 sets out how I have endeavoured to demonstrate Yardley’s four core principles in my study:

Table 3.1: Approaches for ensuring that my qualitative study is defensible, based on Yardley’s four core principles (2008)

Core principle (based on Yardley, 2008)	Examples to demonstrate how I applied these principles
Sensitivity to the context:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Critical analysis of relevant literature across a range of disciplines2. Addressing ethical concerns about how I would engage with participants3. Being open to the views of participants4. Demonstrating awareness of the ways in which my position as researcher influences my perspective and how participants respond to me
Commitment and rigour:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attempting to recruit a range of participants to reflect a variety of young people’s views

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Efforts to achieve sufficient depth and breadth of analysis: for example, in-depth discussion with a colleague of a single transcript to share and compare themes and potential alternative interpretations 3. Applying the principle of reflexivity – being aware of how my role as researcher has influenced and informed my study
Coherence and transparency:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transparency in my explanation of the methods used to analyse the data 2. Ensuring that the way I present the data is coherent with my theoretical perspective, methodology and research design
Impact and importance:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I hope that my study will provide useful insights which can be shared with appropriate agencies locally 2. I hope the study will contribute to our reflections as an EP service on working with young people post-sixteen, and young people who are NEET in particular

3.4.7 Ethical considerations

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) highlight the growing emphasis over the past few decades on ethical practice in educational and social research. They also note that this is a highly complex area. Ethics refers to the rules of conduct and the principles which guide researchers' behaviour to ensure that a study is carried out in a responsible and defensible manner (Robson, 2002; Gray, 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 53) comment that 'ethical research practice is a dynamic process which needs to be monitored throughout data collection and analysis.' In other words, meeting the requirements of ethics committees in the researcher's institution, and professional bodies such as the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009) and the Health and Care Professions Council's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2008), is merely the starting point. Willig (2008a) suggests that

ethical challenges are more likely to arise in qualitative research, due to the open-ended and exploratory nature of such research.

The question of exploring the views of young people who have been NEET poses some ethical dilemmas, including how to ensure that the research isn't exploitative of the participants; that their perspective is genuinely accepted and respected; to what extent they are given 'control' over the research; and that there is a 'point' to the research in terms of improving understanding and/or services for young people who find themselves in this situation.

Many researchers highlight the practical and ethical concerns about attempting to access the views of a potentially 'hard to reach' group of young people. These include the realities that some such young people may not wish to be 'reached' and quite understandably be suspicious of attempts to seek their views; that time and patience is often needed to build relationships; of the existence of fundamental power imbalances between the researcher and the young people, and the possibility of the researcher having to confront very difficult and complex ethical dilemmas during the research process (Trotter and Campbell, 2008; Valentine, Butler and Skelton, 2010; Russell, 2013). I was mindful of these difficulties, but decided to adopt a pragmatic viewpoint which was to identify a 'good enough' process to fulfil core ethical and practical concerns.

My study considered and addressed a range of ethical issues. These included avoidance of harm to the participants; ensuring that participants were able to give fully informed consent before and during the study; ensuring that anonymity of the participants was upheld; and avoidance of deception (for example, not telling participants the complete truth about the aims of the study). I submitted the Approved Ethical Review (AER) to the University of Birmingham's Ethics Committee in March 2013 and this was approved in June 2013 after I had made some minor amendments. I also adhered to the guidelines for conducting research set out by the British Psychological Society (2009), and the Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics laid down by the Health Professions Council (2008; now known as the Health and Care Professions Council).

On the advice of the Head of the Specialist Careers Service, £10 was offered to all participants, but it was made clear that if a participant withdrew there would be no requirement to repay this. The issue of paying interviewees for their time is contentious. Trotter and Campbell (2008) paid the young people who took part in their research, but expressed concern that this seemed exploitative. Russell (2103, p. 50) describing her ethnographic study of young people who were NEET states that 'it is possible to gain young people's trust and time without such financial incentives.' However, her study was conducted over eighteen months and she acknowledges that gaining and maintaining contact with vulnerable young people 'can be time consuming and problematic'. On balance, I judged that the young people I interviewed would not feel pressured to take part by being offered a small sum of money.

In addition to ethical dilemmas, the practical challenges of generating valid insights into the lives of individuals who are marginalised within society are well documented (McLeod, 2008). For example, Trotter and Campbell (2008) sought to actively engage and empower young people categorised as NEET by enlisting them as co-researchers (using 'youth-friendly' technology) in their study aimed at understanding the needs and achievements of such young people. However they expressed ongoing disquiet about the practical and ethical implications of this approach.

Finlay et al (2010) rejected conventional research methods and instead used a variety of creative and artistic activities to explore with a group of young people what it was like to be NEET. Hayward and Williams (2011) also made efforts to engage with young people on their terms, employing different types of communication tools, visual aids and props. Rose, Daiches and Potier (2012) employed participatory research methods to explore how young people understood the terminology surrounding 'social inclusion'.

I ruled out the possibility of using alternative communication tools and of using young people as co-researchers, for reasons which I describe later.

3.5 Method

3.5.1 Recruiting Participants

The study used purposive sampling to select a group of young people who had recently been NEET and who met the criteria which I had decided upon.

Purposive sampling is defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, pp. 114-115) as an approach where:

‘... researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought.’

Purposive sampling seemed the most appropriate method of selecting my sample for the following reasons:

- I wished to focus specifically on the perceptions of a group of young people whose views are under-represented in the literature;
- I decided on specific criteria for inclusion in the study (these are outlined in table 3.2);
- The study was qualitative and aimed to understand the unique view of the world and frames of reference of a relatively small number of participants. There is no intention that their views will be considered representative of the wider population of young people who have recently been NEET.

I originally planned to interview a group of between ten and fifteen young people in the borough who have recently been NEET. The criteria I set out for including young people in the study were as follows:

Table 3.2: List of criteria for including young people in the study

Criteria for inclusion	Rationale
1. The young people would fulfil the standard definition of NEET as outlined at the beginning of the literature review (i.e. that used by the Specialist Careers Service as part of their statutory duties to deliver a NEET service and to collect statistical data for local and national monitoring)	Despite the caveats about using the standard definition of NEET (such as the wide range of personal circumstances and needs experienced by those labelled thus), it allows comparisons with other research
2. The young people to be between seventeen and twenty-four years of age	Lower age limit of seventeen because of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) to seventeen in 2013 Upper age limit of twenty-four because the literature on young people who are NEET tends to use this upper age limit. I hoped to include the experiences of individuals in the younger and older cohorts, as the literature review had suggested some differences between them
3. The young people to have experienced at least six months of being NEET	I considered that being in this situation for at least six months, was a sufficient length of time for a young person to have developed some views about this period in their lives, and to have developed coping strategies
4. The young people to have experienced a couple of months of being in education, employment, or training (EET) prior to their interview	I judged that this would allow a sufficient length of time for interviewees to reflect on their current compared with their previous situation
5. I hoped the study would include both young women and men; and diversity in terms of socioeconomic	The study did not set out to be 'representative', but I thought that a range of respondents would provide a variety of

status, ethnic background; and end destination	<p>perspectives, commonalities and/or differences.</p> <p>I excluded young people in identified 'vulnerable' groups such as those with a special educational need or disability, and those who are or had been looked after or in the care system, as explained below.</p>
--	--

I considered whether to specifically include young people with a special educational need or a disability (SEND) in my study. A possible argument in favour of including them was that this is a group with which EPs are likely to be involved post-sixteen as Education, Health and Care Plans extend the support for young people to the age of twenty-five, and it is also a group that is at greater risk of becoming NEET. I was aware from my discussions with the Head of the Specialist Careers Service that young people with SEND, like young people who are NEET, continue to have access to this service as both are deemed to be 'vulnerable' groups. I surmised that amongst the young people who are NEET, those with SEND might be easier for services to engage with and to support. I therefore concluded that I would focus on young people without SEND who had been in NEET circumstances, as they are possibly a group that is harder to engage and more likely to 'slip through the net' in terms of provision.

I also thought about whether I should include young people who are 'looked after' or who have left the care system, but as with young people who are in the SEND group, I decided that it would be more practicable to exclude them. Again, these groups are generally a priority when allocating provision, due to their specific needs and circumstances and their statistically poorer outcomes.

In the LA in question, they will continue to have access to the Specialist Careers Service.

The process of recruiting young people to take part in my study proved to be much more difficult and time consuming than I originally anticipated. As the young people I intended to interview would not normally be known to the EPS, I initially sought advice in October 2012 from the Head of the Specialist Careers Service and the Principal EP on suitable methods of recruiting young people to take part. My original plan, drawn up with the Head of the Specialist Careers Service involved producing a flyer asking for volunteers, which the Service kindly offered to distribute via email to young people known to them. There was also a possibility that Specialist Careers Advisors might be able to follow up with young people who were on their caseload. The time of year also had a bearing on the likely availability of young people - as the Head of the Specialist Careers Service explained, the number of young people who become NEET increases after they leave school in May, but many can be difficult to contact after a few months.

This plan did not go ahead, as by the time I was in a position to move ahead with the research, the Specialist Careers Service was undergoing a major reorganisation. In retrospect I am not sure how effective my flyer would have been in persuading young people to take part, in view of the difficulties of obtaining a response typically associated with postal canvassing (Robson, 2002, Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

I subsequently met again with the Head of the Specialist Careers Service in March 2013 and on his advice, contacted the following agencies, with a view to carrying out the interviewing in the Autumn Term 2013 (because the timetable for obtaining ethical approval from the University was six to eight weeks): a local FE College running programmes for young people who are NEET; a training provider offering study skills programmes for young people; the Youth Service; and a member of the LA's employment team with responsibility for young people.

I had problems in getting any response from staff at the local FE College and the Youth Service, and therefore decided it would be too time-consuming to follow these leads up. I was successful in meeting the Business Development Manager at a local training provider in October 2013 and an officer from the LA Employment Team in January 2014. Both of them were happy to support with the research and confident that they would be able to identify and recruit young people who met the criteria. In view of the time which had by now elapsed, I was happy to go ahead with this arrangement and to rely on these two contacts for all my interviewees. I also sought two or three young people with whom to pilot the interview schedule. The LA Employment Officer was particularly confident given his positive relationship with the young people he'd worked with, that he would be able to find some young people with interesting stories to tell.

My contacts agreed to contact or speak to potentially suitable young people on my behalf, to explain the purpose of the study and what would be involved if the young person decided to take part (to help the adults, I provided them with an

information sheet summarising the key points). If the young person agreed to take part, the adult then helped him or her to complete a personal consent form, and to obtain parental consent for young people aged less than eighteen.

The process of recruiting interviewees proved more difficult than my contacts (or I) had anticipated. Many young people in the training centre did not wish to take part, as was also the case for many of those who had had involvement with the Employment Officer. The Employment Officer commented that in many cases, making contact with the young people in the first place was the problem, as they did not respond to calls to their mobiles or to emails.

Eventually I succeeded through my two contacts, in interviewing four young people attending the training centre and five young people on an apprenticeship scheme with the Council. Pen pictures of the nine young people are provided in 3.5.5 (each is identified with an initial between A and I).

3.5.2 Interview design

I decided that a face to face approach with young people would provide the most detailed information, and the two methods I considered for data gathering were using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. I ruled out using creative approaches with young people such as art, photography and drama, partly due to the limitations on my time as a full time EP, and partly because I did not consider myself to have appropriate skills nor resources to work in these ways.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, because I believed that having individual face to face discussions, would enable me to build a rapport with participants and to create the best conditions for in-depth exploration of the experiences of a single individual at a time. Smith and Osborn (2008, p. 57) suggest that:

‘this form of interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants’ responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise.’

The idea of conducting focus groups was ruled out, because I was concerned about the possibility for some individuals to be inhibited from talking about their experiences within a group, particularly in view of the potentially sensitive personal nature of some information.

A semi-structured format allowed me more scope to adapt the interview so that it was suitable for the interviewee (for example, varying language, providing explanations, and exploring a theme in more depth). Thomas (2009) describes a typical interview schedule as consisting of issues, which lead to possible questions, which lead onto follow up questions and finally lead to probes which encourage the interviewee to continue with aspects of their answers. The potential disadvantages of a semi-structured interview might include the interviewee providing responses that he/she thinks the interviewer wishes to hear, the factor of researcher bias, and the time that semi-structured interviews

take to conduct and to analyse. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in **Appendix 1**.

As the study is broadly interpretivist, the notion that the interviewer and interviewee will have their own perceptions and constructions of the interview and the topics under discussion is already a given and is not regarded as problematic; this was therefore explicitly acknowledged by me at the outset of each interview. I tailored my approach and script with the aim of minimising any pressure on the interviewee.

I considered the idea of training young people who have had experience of being NEET, to conduct interviews. A potential advantage of this might be that young people might give a more authentic account of their experiences to another young person, (although I do not believe this is necessarily the case, due to the barriers which might exist between two young people who do not know each other). I recognised that how I might be perceived by interviewees (for example as a middle aged professional woman who has not been in their position nor faced the challenges they have faced) might be a barrier to them being able to share how they really felt.

However I concluded that it would be preferable to carry the interviews out myself. I hoped that my experiences of talking to many different young people in my role as an EP would enable me to establish a rapport with participants. There would also have been considerable practical barriers of selecting and

training suitable interviewers, and I anticipated that it would also be more difficult to analyse the interviews, if I hadn't directly carried them out myself.

The format of the interviews was naturalistic and as a starting point asked young people to reflect on their current experiences ('now'), then moved to past experiences of being NEET ('then'), and finally explored the participant's views about the future (the future'). This format seemed the most natural (starting with the 'here and now') and also anticipated that potentially more sensitive topics (the experience of being NEET) were covered once the young person had been put at ease.

The aim was to generate a conversation that was as natural as possible, so relatively few, open-ended questions were asked, with accompanying prompts to follow up issues that arose. As stated by Hoggart and Smith (2004, p. 237), the aim was to 'develop a conversational style, picking up on the young person's situation and perceptions.'

Based on my experience of working with young people as an EP, I decided that it might facilitate the discussion with the young people if I provided specific tasks and visual 'props' to support their understanding of the areas I wished to cover. I therefore prepared a sheet of flipchart paper in landscape format (see figure 3.1 below) to cover 'the present – what's happening now?'; 'the past - the time when you found yourself without a job or college placement or training' and 'the future'. I used it at the start of each interview to show the young person

what areas we would cover, but it was also useful as a prompt and also a space for the young person to draw or write on if needed.

Figure 3.1: Time line grid used during the interviews with young people

Now	Then	The future

For each of the time periods ‘now’ and ‘then’, I produced an A3 sheet divided into ‘helped me’ and ‘didn’t help me’, as shown in figure 3.2. This helped to support the discussion with the young people about what had helped or not helped them in these two phases of their lives.

Figure 3.2: Grid to support discussion about what the young person found helped or didn’t help when they were ‘NEET’ and since moving out of ‘NEET’

Now/Then	
Helped me	Didn’t help me

I also anticipated based on my experience as an EP that young people might find it difficult to describe a variety of emotions and I therefore provided twenty-one ‘thoughts and feelings’ cards reflecting a range of perceptions. These were presented in random order and respondents were asked to sort them into five categories to reflect how frequently they experienced the feelings in question both at the time when they were NEET, and since they had moved out of being

NEET. The list of ‘thoughts and feelings’ words and frequency categories are shown in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3: List of ‘thoughts and feelings’ words and frequency categories

Disappointed Relieved Relaxed Gloomy Fed up Bored Pessimistic Other Confident Happy Excited	Hopeful Stressed Proud Optimistic Sad Worried Angry Frustrated Motivated Calm
Frequency categories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I never feel/felt this • I rarely feel/felt this • I sometimes feel/felt this • I often feel/felt this • I almost always feel/felt this 	

The written thoughts and feelings cards, the flip chart sheets with ‘now’, ‘then’ and ‘the future’ and the other visual aids were intended to support the young person, but to ensure that they didn’t create an additional barrier for anyone with literacy difficulties, I read everything out and invited the young people to ask me about any words they weren’t sure of.

3.5.3 Pilot interviews

My purposes in piloting the interviews were to check that the interview schedule enabled me to obtain the information that I was seeking; and to identify

strengths and any gaps in the process. I piloted the interview schedule and the props with a young woman aged twenty-four and a young man aged nineteen. They did not meet all my criteria for inclusion in the study, as the young woman was still in the situation of being NEET, and the young man had experienced less than six months of being NEET, but I considered that they would be able to give me valuable insights into the interview process and the supportive tools.

The pilot interviews established that the questions had produced sufficiently rich data along the lines that I was hoping, and the young people fed back that they had found the visual aids useful. The different experiences of the two young people reinforced the importance of retaining flexibility in the interview structure, in order to follow up interesting points. I made some minor changes to the order of the questions as a result of the pilot, and included the question 'what do you feel is helping or not helping you in your life at the moment?' in the discussion about 'now', to mirror the same question in relation to the experience of being NEET.

3.5.4 Interview process

An important decision was to identify a suitable setting for the interviews to take place. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend that a place that is comfortable and familiar for the participant is preferable, but safeguarding questions dictate that the participant's home will not be appropriate. It is often necessary to identify suitable rooms in public buildings which are easily accessible, comfortable, quiet and free from interruptions. The question of

where to hold my interviews was resolved by the practical consideration that the interviewees took time out of their day at the training provider or at their employment to meet me. I was given therefore given access to a room at the training provider, to interview four of the young people, and at the council, to interview the five apprentices. All of the interviewees seemed comfortable with this arrangement.

Before each individual interview, I went through the information sheet and consent form (**Appendices 2 and 3** respectively) with each young person individually, making clear that he or she was free to withdraw from the interview at any time, or from the study, up to the deadline I had set of June 2014 (when I anticipated starting the data analysis). For those young people who were aged less than eighteen, my contact in the 'host' organisation had arranged for parental consent forms to be completed (**Appendix 4**). Each interview was about an hour in length, and was captured using a digital recorder. The young people were specifically asked again before the interview if they consented to it being recorded. All agreed to being recorded and I was not aware that this altered or inhibited what they said.

The interviews with the nine young people took place over a four month period between December 2013 and April 2014. I completed eight interviews in full and a ninth (with respondent B) was incomplete. B seemed upset at times during our discussion and opted not to return after her lunch break, although she told me that she was willing to complete the interview at another time. Following this, I highlighted my concerns about B's response to the interview to staff at the

training centre. The interview was on the last day before the Christmas holiday and therefore nearly three weeks elapsed before I could arrange another interview. By this time B had completed her course and left the training centre. Following discussion with my supervisor it was agreed that it would be appropriate to include B's interview in the analysis.

3.5.5 Pen picture of the participants

Table 3.4 provides a summary of the backgrounds of the young people who were interviewed. It was evident from the point at which they were recruited that some of the young people did not fully meet the criteria I had set at the outset of the study, first; being NEET for at least six months, and second; being EET for more than two months. In some cases, their circumstances resembled the 'churning' phenomenon described in the Wolf Report (2011) and outlined under 'training' in my literature review, where young people oscillate back and forth between education courses and short term employment. I decided that my original criteria should reflect the reality of this 'churning' phenomenon, and therefore included these young people in the study.

Table 3.4: ‘Pen picture’ of the nine young people who took part

Participant age and gender	Current situation	NEET circumstances
A Young woman aged 18	Has attended work based learning provider for four months: on a study skills course, working towards Level 2 in English, Maths and ICT Lives at home with Mum and partner Receives small amount of money for attending the course Wants to be a bus driver	Left school at 16 with no qualifications NEET for 6 months Attended an FE College but couldn't progress as didn't have Level 1 Maths
B Young woman aged 17	Has attended work based learning provider for three months: on a study skills course, working towards Level 2 in English, Maths and ICT Lives at home with Mum Receives small amount of money for attending the course Wants to do a childcare course	Dropped out of school at 16 after getting into a fight. NEET for at least 2 months
C Young woman aged 17	Has attended work based learning provider for three months: on a study skills course, working towards Level 3 in English, and Level 1 in Maths and ICT Lives with dad and nan Wants to do a childcare course	Disrupted education and permanently excluded from three schools NEET for 9 or 10 months Had nowhere to live for a few weeks when father threw her out; social services involvement
D Young woman aged 21	Has attended work based learning provider for six months: previously completed a parenting course and now working towards Level 1 maths Lives with her 3 year old daughter On benefits Wants to work with children e.g. in a Children's Centre, nursery, or do a teaching assistant course	Left school and moved in with partner at 16. Attended college for a couple of months then dropped out. Got a job with computers but left after having a miscarriage. NEET for a year before having her daughter, and looking for work from when her daughter was a year old. Split up with partner before daughter's second birthday, moved back to her parents and attended parenting course.
E Young woman aged 18	Seven months into a two year apprenticeship with the Council Has 13+ GCSEs with good grades and functional skills in business and IT. Studying for NVQ Level 1 and 2 in business and administration on the job. Lives with mum and younger	Was on course to go to university but plans affected by Dad's terminal illness and death Left 6 th form after 6 weeks, was NEET for a time, then tried another 6 th form for 2 months, then got telesales job for a month or two, then NEET again for 3-4 months. Started a 3 month Prince's Trust

	<p>brother</p> <p>Receives a wage</p> <p>Unsure what she wants to do long term</p>	<p>Course which she left when she got a two week voluntary work experience placement followed by the pre-apprenticeship course at the council</p>
<p>F</p> <p>Young man aged 18</p>	<p>Previously on apprenticeship but just applied for and got full time job</p> <p>Left school with poor grades, had to obtain Level 1 English to get on the apprenticeship</p> <p>Sleeping on the sofa at girlfriend's aunt's house</p> <p>Receives a wage</p> <p>Unsure what he wants to do long term</p>	<p>Had to leave home when Mum threw him out, in supported housing for a time before moving to current town with girlfriend.</p> <p>Left school at 16. Was NEET and on benefits for approximately 15 months</p> <p>Did a painting and decorating course in previous town and started college in current town but dropped out.</p>
<p>G</p> <p>Young woman aged 17</p>	<p>Seven months into two year apprenticeship with the Council</p> <p>Has 10 GCSEs</p> <p>Studying for NVQ Level 1 and 2 in business and administration on the job.</p> <p>Lives with parents</p> <p>Receives a wage</p> <p>Wants to work for the Council</p>	<p>Started 6th form but left NEET for 9-10 months</p>
<p>H</p> <p>Young woman aged 18</p>	<p>Seven months into two year apprenticeship with the Council</p> <p>8 or 9 GCSEs</p> <p>Studying for NVQ Level 1 and 2 in business and administration on the job</p> <p>Lives with parents</p> <p>Receives a wage</p> <p>Not sure what she wants to do in the future</p>	<p>Left school towards end of 6th form (year 13)</p> <p>NEET for several months</p>
<p>I</p> <p>Young woman aged 18</p>	<p>Seven months into two year apprenticeship with the Council</p> <p>Has BTECS but not good grades</p> <p>Studying for NVQ Level 2 in English, business, administration on the job</p> <p>Lives with dad, stepmother and siblings</p> <p>Receives a wage</p> <p>Would like a job with the Council</p>	<p>Left school at 16, did beauty course at college but dropped out. NEET for 2 months.</p> <p>Moved out of area, from Mum to dad.</p> <p>Started course in hospitality at college, with work experience at Costa. Dropped out, NEET for a month</p>

3.6 Interviews with adult stakeholders

As set out in Chapter One, I decided that it would be useful to interview adults who had professional involvement locally with young people in an educational, training or work capacity after they leave school. My purposes for doing this were two-fold. First, I hoped to gain an insight into the local context for young people who were at risk of becoming NEET or who were NEET, from the perspectives of adults who had various roles with such young people. This served a valuable purpose of providing a general backdrop to the perspectives of the young people, each of whom was focused on her or his individual circumstances. Second, I was interested to relate the adults' views with the young people's perspectives about the impacts of being NEET, and any factors which were regarded as being enabling or barriers to improving opportunities. 'Triangulation' refers to this process of endeavouring to examine issues from different viewpoints in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon (Thomas, 2009).

After explaining the purpose of the interviews and gaining written consent, I interviewed the four professionals between July and August 2014. Each was recorded and lasted between forty minutes and an hour. The interview questions are described in **Appendix 5**. Broadly speaking, I wished to explore:

- the nature of their involvement with young people who have experienced a period of NEET;

- their perceptions of the impact on such young people, using specific examples from their work;
- their analysis about how such young people can best be supported, both locally and nationally, and;
- their thoughts about what agencies could do to overcome any barriers to young people entering education, employment or training.

The four adults had diverse professional roles with regard to young people and I therefore asked them to give me a ‘pen picture’ of their roles. These are summarised below:

Table 3.5: ‘Pen picture’ of professional roles of the adults interviewed

Respondent	J	K	L	M
Pen picture of role	Head of a Department in the Council	Business Development Manager at a training provider	Part of small LA employment team of four covering the borough, has role to provide tailored support to 16 to 17 year olds (300)	Head of LA Specialist Careers Service (previously Careers service with universal function for 14 – 19 year olds). Following changes in Education Act of 2011, the role of the service is now to deliver targeted careers advice and guidance to young people who are deemed ‘vulnerable’, including NEETS
Capacity in which involved with the young people interviewed	J’s department provided twelve- week job experience for twelve young people; shortlisted and interviewed eight; took on five apprentices, all of whom were interviewed as part of this research	Runs the centre where I interviewed three young people	Works face to face with the young people and with agencies that are engaged with young people Recruited and mentored the apprentices in J’s department who were interviewed as	No direct involvement with

			part of this research	the young people I interviewed
--	--	--	-----------------------	--------------------------------

Three of the four individuals (J, K and L) had direct involvement with one or more of the nine interviewees, and the fourth (M) was not directly involved with the young people in the study, but had a generic professional role with young people who are NEET. K, L and M had professional roles specifically concerned with supporting young people who are NEET, but J's professional role did not. Her department in the Council had agreed to take on a group of young people for pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships as part of an initiative to provide opportunities for young people in the North of the Borough who were NEET. In view of the diverse involvement these professionals had with young people who were or had been NEET, I expected some differences of viewpoint to emerge from the interviews.

Rather than conducting an in-depth transcription and thematic analysis of the interviews as I had done with the nine young people, I opted to carry out a 'lighter touch' process outlined by Thomas (2009) to analyse the discussions with the four professionals. The first stage of this process is known as the 'constant comparative method', which entails repeatedly going through the data (in this case, the recorded interviews) comparing each element with all the other elements, as follows:

1. I listened to the interviews and made a list of important recurring ideas or topics made by each respondent in relation to the four broad questions above (temporary constructs).
2. I listened to the interviews again and drew up a grid with the temporary construct on the left hand side and references to where the construct was evidenced on the right hand side, together with my notes and observations. I made a note of any temporary constructs which did not seem to have been reinforced or did not 'fit' with the data.
3. I identified 'second-order constructs' which seemed to summarise the themes in my data and to be a good fit.
4. I listened to the interviews again to check that the second-order constructs captured the essence of the data, and labelled these as themes.

The second stage of the process involves mapping out the relationship between the themes, by means of a 'network analysis'. According to Thomas (2009, p. 198) 'network analysis shows how themes are related to one another in a nested arrangement, with each branch holding a range of other ideas.' My network analysis is depicted in Chapter Four, along with a discussion of how the perspectives of the professionals compare with those of the young people.

3.7 Data analysis of the interviews with the young people

To analyse the interviews with the young people, I followed the phases set out in the paper by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data

I originally intended to transcribe all the interviews myself, as Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 87-88) recommend that this 'can be an excellent way to start familiarizing yourself with the data' and 'you will develop a far more thorough understanding of your data through having transcribed it.' I was able to transcribe one interview completely, and started to transcribe a further two, but then decided to have all the interviews professionally transcribed through a contact that had been used by another doctoral researcher. This was partly due to pressures on my time at work, and partly because due to my hearing impairment, I found it particularly difficult to hear all the detail of the audio recordings. I met the person who would do the transcriptions beforehand to discuss my research and to explain how I wanted the transcriptions to be done, and ensured that she adhered to the same standards of confidentiality as those I had set.

To address the potential drawback of not transcribing the interviews myself, I spent extra time familiarising myself with the data and checking the fidelity of the transcripts with the original recordings, as recommended by Braun and

Clarke (2006). This entailed listening to each individual interview several times in conjunction with re-reading each transcription, and frequently returning to both as I went through the phases of data analysis. It was an advantage that I had conducted the original interviews as I had a 'mental picture' of each young person and the issues which arose for her or him. At this point I began to make notes of interesting initial ideas which I identified in the transcriptions.

Phase Two: Generating initial codes

My next step was to select a single interview (E) and to analyse this in depth, in order to generate a list of initial codes. I went through the interview line by line, paying close attention to what E was saying and 'chunked' her smallest comments into basic codes. These were entered into a grid with the relevant extracts from the data alongside the list of codes, in addition to any interpretations I made of E's comments. Part of this grid can be found in **Appendix 6**. As a result of this process I identified forty-five codes, which I recorded and numbered individually on post-it notes and displayed on a large board. Subsequently I utilised the 'constant comparative method' (Thomas, 2009) to compare the other eight interview transcripts with interviewee E. This entailed listening to the interviews, reading through the transcripts, and identifying basic codes which I was either able to collate with those from interviewee E, or to add as new codes to my display board. At this stage I was mindful of the need to keep the process open ended and not to move too

quickly to 'fixing' the codes, while also making a note of apparent overlaps and redundancy in the codes.

Phase Three: searching for themes

Having gone through the iterative process of analysing the nine interviews as described, I generated a list of fifty-five basic codes. These are shown in **Appendix 7**. My next step was to organise these into potential themes by grouping the basic codes together into clusters. I used three methods to achieve this: first, by physically rearranging the post-it notes on the display board, second, by writing each code on a slip of paper and experimenting with organising these into piles according to themes, and third, by cutting up the interviews and sorting the extracts into the fifty-five basic codes (some extracts contained more than one code).

At this point the codes were not differentiated according to the young person's circumstances (that is, whether s/he was talking about being NEET or since becoming EET). As my research was fundamentally focused on asking young people to reflect on their situation when NEET, compared with their situation now that they were EET, and it was clear from their accounts that their perceptions had significantly changed between these two experiences, I decided at this point to divide the analysis into these two global themes and to sort the basic codes accordingly (some of the codes appeared in both global themes).

I therefore produced initial thematic maps for **‘being EET – ‘now’** and **‘being NEET – ‘then’**.

Phase Four: reviewing themes

This stage of the process involved two levels of reviewing and refining my themes. At the first level, I read through all the collated basic codes in order to confirm if they formed a coherent pattern **within** the themes (Patton, 1990, refers to ‘internal homogeneity’ which is the extent to which the data that belong in a certain category cohere in a meaningful way).

The second level involved checking whether the codes adequately reflected the content of the interviews **as a whole** (Patton, 1990, describes this as ‘external heterogeneity’ which concerns the extent to which differences between categories are clear).

These two levels of analysis resulted in my making a number of changes to my thematic maps, for example to take account of instances where I merged two separate themes to form a single main theme (for example, combining ‘family relationships’ with ‘role of peers’ to create the theme ‘significant relationships’) and where I identified that a basic code (such as attitude to independence) seemed to represent a main theme. **Appendices 8 and 9** show the relationship between the global themes, main themes, subordinate themes and basic codes for EET and NEET.

By the end of this phase, I had created two thematic maps to show two global themes and their related subordinate themes:

- 1. Being in education, employment or training – ‘now’ (figure 4.1 can be found in Chapter Four on page 113)**
- 2. Being ‘not in education, employment or training’ – ‘then’ (figure 4.2 can be found in Chapter Four on page 140)**

Phase Five: defining and naming themes

Having produced my two thematic maps as described, my next step was to carry out ongoing analysis in order to generate clear definitions and names for each main theme and subordinate theme. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 96) suggest that it should be possible to describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences, and the themes should be ‘internally coherent, consistent and distinctive.’ This phase involved a great deal of further reorganisation of the data as I identified that there were many inconsistencies and overlaps in my themes. My definitions of main themes and subordinate themes are outlined in the next chapter.

Phase Six: producing the report

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 93), the criteria for producing a good quality analysis and write-up of the data are to provide ‘a concise, coherent,

logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell –within and across themes.’ They further point out that the analysis needs to go beyond describing the data, to make an argument in relation to the research question. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a study by Frith and Gleeson (2004) which they suggest is a good example of an inductive thematic analysis and I have found it helpful to examine this in some detail. The next two chapters provide a description and analysis of my findings, with the aim of meeting these criteria.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

As explained in Chapter Three, Phase Six of the thematic analysis set out by Braun and Clarke (2006) entails producing a robust analysis of the findings and this is the primary focus of this chapter.

I begin with an inductive analysis of how the young people concerned, thought and felt about being in EET (4.2), compared with their experiences and views of being NEET (4.3).

The interview format asked young people to reflect on their current experiences ('now') before talking about their past experiences of being NEET ('then'). I decided to preserve this order in the following analysis, because a significant feature of the study design was that it was retrospective – the participants were *looking back* on the experience of being NEET from the position of being in education, employment or training. Their perspectives would arguably have been very different if I had interviewed them when they were NEET.

Kierkegaard's (1992[1846]) insight that 'lives are lived forwards, yet understood backwards', cited by Holland and Thomson (2004), seems particularly apt in this context.

The two global themes (being 'in education, employment or training' and being 'not in education, employment or training') and the main and subordinate themes associated with each are defined, mapped out and analysed using illustrative extracts from the young people's accounts.

This is to address my first four research questions:

1. What perceptions do young people have looking back, about their experiences of being 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET)?
2. How do young people's perceptions about being NEET compare with their perceptions now that they have moved on to education, employment or training (EET)?
3. What supportive factors at different levels (self, family, wider community) do young people identify which enabled them to manage their situation and/or move out of being NEET?
4. What barriers do young people identify which hindered them from managing their situation and/or moving out of being NEET?

I then present the inductive analysis of the views of 'associated professionals' (in section 4.4), in order to address my final research question:

5. In the experience of adults supporting young people who are or who have been NEET, what factors help such young people

to achieve successful outcomes, or hinder them from doing so?

Chapter Five will present a deductive analysis of the findings, derived from themes and issues in the literature.

4.2 Being ‘in education, employment or training’ (EET)

The definition developed for this global theme is ‘young people’s views about moving into education, employment or training on their life path towards independent adulthood’. I identified the following four main themes in the transcriptions:

- **Learning from the NEET experience**
- **Support and opportunities to prepare for life beyond school**
- **How society views ‘young people’**
- **Looking to the future**

Figure 4.1 on page 113 shows the thematic map for ‘being EET’, and Table 4.1 overleaf shows the subordinate themes associated with each main theme.

Table 4.1: Relationship between the main themes and subordinate themes for being ‘in education, employment or training’

Global Theme: Being EET	
Main themes	Subordinate themes
Learning from the NEET experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Hindsight ii. Self efficacy
Support and opportunities to prepare for life beyond school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Education and learning ii. Training and work iii. Family and friends
How society views ‘young people’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Being a young employee ii. Importance of encouragement and support beyond family and friends iii. Stereotypes
Looking to the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Attitude to independence ii. Optimism iii. Insecurity

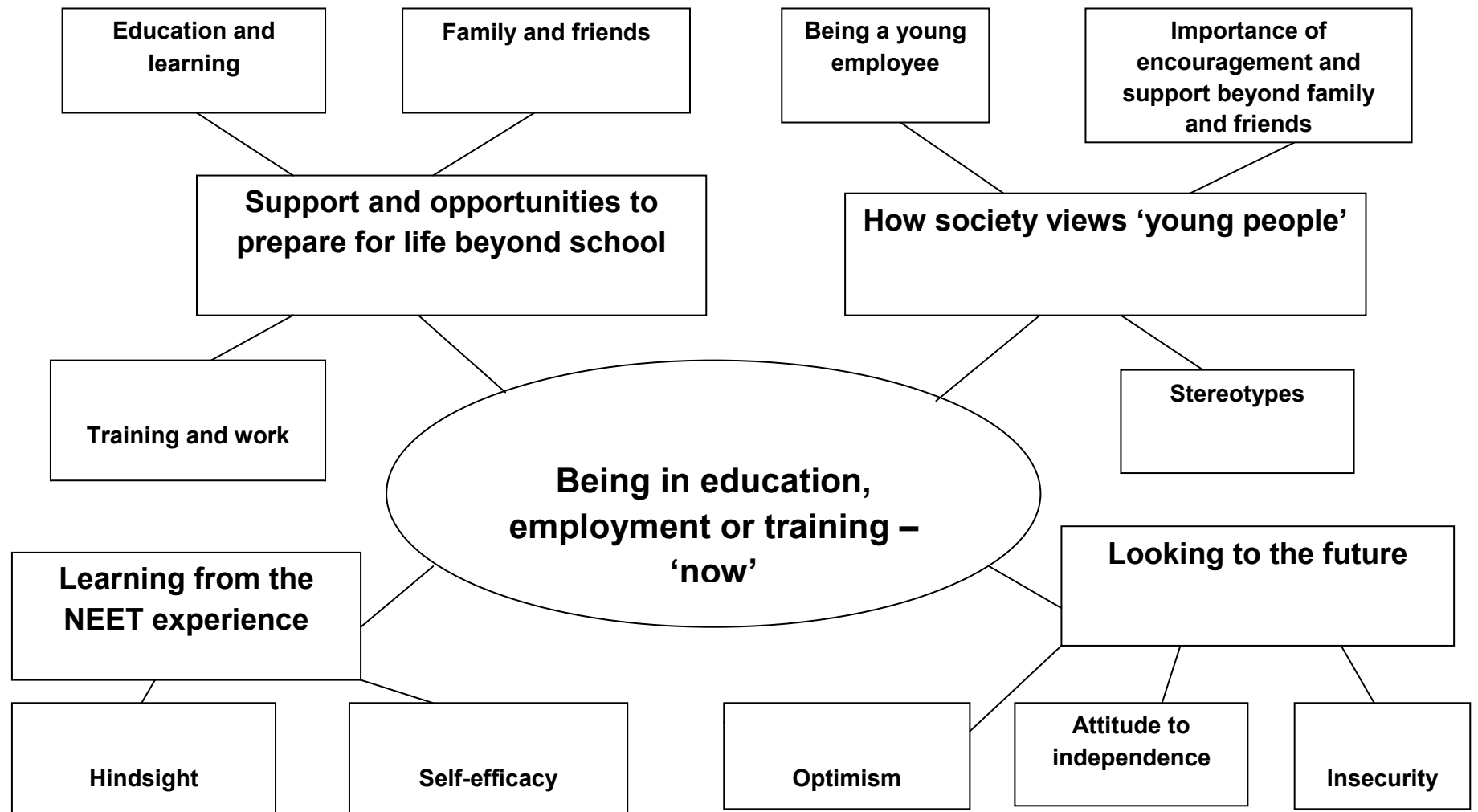


Figure 4.1: Final thematic map showing global theme: being ‘in education, employment or training’

4.2.1 Learning from the NEET experience

4.2.1(i) Hindsight

I defined this theme as 'how young people think and feel looking back on the experience of being NEET'. Two of the interview questions asked the young people to sort twenty 'thoughts and feelings' cards to reflect how they felt now that they were in education, employment or training, and how they felt 'then' at the time they were NEET. They were then asked to elaborate on their reasons for sorting the cards in the way they had. The qualitative and quantitative information from this process clearly shows that NEET status was associated with extremely few positive feelings for the respondents, and in most cases with a high number of negative feelings. The young people's responses are described in detail in **Appendix 10**. Overall, respondents unanimously felt more positive with their current situation than they had been when NEET, but some expressed mixed feelings about 'now' and were evidently not feeling fully settled in their lives.

With one exception (B), the respondents seemed to have moved on sufficiently in their lives to look back on their time as NEET with a degree of perspective and acceptance. In B's case, her experiences had seemed too raw for her to revisit, and this seemed to be a factor in her not completing her interview. All of the interviewees identified that their NEET situation had arisen through a combination of circumstances. They described personal factors for which they took some responsibility (such as their behaviour at school), and external

factors which they thought should have been handled differently (for example the support offered at or after school).

When they were asked if they had learned anything from their time of being NEET, many of the young people seemed highly motivated to avoid a repeat of the experience:

Interviewer: *Erm how do you think that time of your life, that six months has actually changed you as a person?*

G: *"I think it's definitely made me never wanna be like that again."*

Interviewer: *Really yeah.*

G: *"It's definitely made me like more motivated to stay in my job."*

Interviewer: *OK, yeah.*

G: *"Or if I was gonna leave, to get, to walk straight into another one and never ever have to sit there again and not have a job I think. That's definitely one of the big ones."*

Although the young people expressed mainly negative views about being NEET, most were able to identify things they had learned from this life experience. The ability to see difficult experiences as growth points was a strong theme in many of the narratives.

E said she had gained maturity and optimism:

Interviewer: *...how you think this time of your life's changed you and you know what you've learnt from it?*

E: *"A lot. I've definitely grew as a person. I don't know. I think I've matured a lot faster than a lot of my friends as well now 'cause I've seen myself outgrowing all my well, all of my friends from school I've pretty much outgrown now."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

E: *"So yeah I think it's changed me as a person. It's definitely made me more of an optimistic person and gives you a little bit more, a little bit*

more hope. That you like you will, you will end up being where you want to be.”

F felt that he had learned valuable independence skills as a result of his circumstances of having to live in supported housing and being NEET. His comments also reflected a strong sense of optimism:

F: *“Yeah erm, I learnt how to be independent, I learnt how to use a washing machine, err, cooker.”*

Interviewer: *Practical things.*

F: *“Yeah, yeah good things that I can use for life. Erm, I learnt not the system, but the support that is available for, for a variety of different situations.”*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

F: *“It, should they arise. Erm, and I learnt that everything is not all doom and gloom. And I learnt that I don’t know, even in the worst place that you think you can possibly be you can still, I don’t know, get somewhere.”*

However many young people expressed regrets about the choices they had made and the pathways they had chosen. Three of the apprentices regretted missing out on the opportunity to go onto higher education. Respondent F saw himself as responsible for not sorting his life out sooner, while D reflected on how her life might have been different in terms of job prospects and economic security:

F: *“‘Cause I mean I, I think I could have done more with my life if I had sorted it out before the sort of point where I realised ‘oh actually I’ve, I’ve messed it up for myself’.”*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

F: *“I should have worked it out before that. Erm”*

Interviewer: *Erm, why did you end up in that situation?*

D: *"I don't know..."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

D: *"...I feel like it just, I feel like I was kind of pressured but at the time it seemed like such a good, like looking back at it, it seemed like a... I thought in my head it was a really good idea to not go to college and to move away from home and..."*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

D: *"...in my head at the time it seemed, but I look back and I think it's the worst thing I could of ever done."*

Interviewer: *Really?*

D: *"I really wish now that I had stuck to my college, completed it 'cause my life would be completely different and even if I had my daughter still..."*

Interviewer: *Yes.*

D: *"I would have been probably in a good job by now, still would have my daughter and she still would be going to nursery but I just would have been so much better off."*

Interviewer: *Really, yeah.*

D: *"So I have so much regret at that time."*

4.2.1(ii) Self efficacy

The definition developed for this main theme is 'young people describe the current strength of their belief in their personal ability to complete tasks and reach goals'. Most of the young people expressed a strong sense of personal efficacy. Although their self-confidence varied, they took responsibility for their choices in life, talked about their goals (for example gaining qualifications to enter particular jobs such as becoming a bus driver or a Teaching Assistant) and hoped that they would get on in life. They suggested a range of personal qualities which had helped them: academic ability, being able to get on with others, motivation, maturity, and pride in their achievements.

Having strong personal motivation to do well was a frequently mentioned theme:

G: *"Erm I think it comes a lot from yourself."*

Interviewer: *OK.*

G: *"I think it's definitely gotta be from what you wanna do or...not other people's opinions 'cause at the end of the day even if people do give their opinions you're always gonna do what you wanna do."*

Interviewer: *That's true.*

G: *"Like erm, so I definitely think you've gotta be quite like motivated and actually wanna do well in life to actually do it, be positive and...sort of thing. So I think you have gotta, you've definitely gotta feel good in yourself...to be in that situation, to have a good situation and stuff so yeah."*

E talked about being an academically able student who had achieved good grades at school and this was evidently important to her sense of identity and self efficacy:

E: *"...I'm not silly and I'm not dumb and that I know I'm capable of doing it and doing it to the best of my ability."*

Having not done well at school, A now felt pride about her learning:

A: *'With work and that I feel proud in some things I do.'*

Some respondents still had to cope with difficult situations which had improved but were not fully resolved now they had moved on to EET. F continued to rely on sleeping on the sofa at his girlfriend's, while D grappled with retaining her independence from her ex-partner:

D: "So I have to try and kind of just concentrate on me and my future rather than letting him take over my mind again kind of thing 'cause that's how I see it."

4.2.2 Support and opportunities to prepare for life beyond school

4.2.2(i) Education and learning

This theme focused on 'how well young people felt that education helps to prepare them for adult life'. Many young people acknowledged the value of education, particularly as a means to gain qualifications, and recognised that not having qualifications limited the job options available:

Interviewer: Erm, how is this you know this time at [training provider], how does it fit with what you hope to do with your life later on?

C: "Because I need to get the grades."

Interviewer: OK.

C: "To do what I need to do."

Interviewer: OK.

C: "Like to do what I want to do. Because If I have no grades then I'm not gonna get anywhere."

Many of the young people were critical of the preparation for adulthood they had received at school, although they had often found individual staff to be supportive. They commented that schools only focused on grades; that able students were pushed towards the sixth form and university; that schools didn't cater for the needs of students who wanted jobs or apprenticeships; and that in general there was insufficient advice and guidance in school to help students to make choices, to know where to look for further guidance and to understand the

need to take responsibility for their life paths. G described the assumption at her school that students would stay on at sixth form and apply to university:

Interviewer: ...do you think, advice could have been a bit better at school or...?

G: "Erm, I suppose it could of yeah I think, I think they thought that the majority was gonna go to the sixth form anyway I think so they didn't really think about what other people might wanna do or what other colleges are out there to offer or jobs or apprenticeships or anything, I don't think they really thought about the other people like. Not everyone wanted to go to sixth form."

Interviewer: No, no.

G: "Not everyone wanted to go to college like some people might of just wanted a job straight off or something like that."

There was little mention of receiving specific careers advice, though H told me that she had been helped with writing a curriculum vitae. H had found it helpful to be taken to an apprenticeship fair in the sixth form, having complained to her mentor about the emphasis on applying for university.

Some respondents described the kinds of preparation for adult life which they thought that schools should offer:

E: "...I think they need to kind of help more with the guidance and just getting people to understand that once they leave school or leave education like, their life's like down to them then. Like they've gotta choose where they're going."

H: "Well all the talks and stuff that, and trips that they do for uni they should do for other places."

Interviewer: Right.

H: "And talk more about jobs and stuff 'cause..."

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

H: "...that's what the majority of young people are gonna do."

Turning to educational opportunities after leaving school, the routes taken by young people have become increasingly complicated since the raising of the participation age and the wider range of providers. The literature review highlighted that the distinctions between 'education', 'training' and 'work' are becoming increasingly blurred. Deciding how to categorise young people's experiences is therefore somewhat arbitrary, but I have included sixth form and college experiences under 'education and learning', while 'on the job' learning has been included under 'training and work'.

The post-school experience of these young people included a period of NEET, interspersed in some cases with periods of trying different educational settings or jobs. Some had moved onto their sixth forms in Years 12 and 13. Sixth form provision has been categorised along with FE colleges, training providers, and employers as 'post-school', partly because sixth form seemed to be regarded by the young people as a different environment from school (even though their expectations of it were sometimes disappointed), and also because there was no automatic entitlement to a place there, even if the young person had attended the school.

Those in a post-sixteen educational setting not attached to a school, generally spoke very positively about the environment and teaching input compared with their experience at school. They perceived staff to be more approachable and the environment to be more relaxed. C, who had experienced poor relationships with teachers at school, felt very positive about the staff at the training provider:

Interviewer: ...what do you feel is, is positive about being at [training provider] especially?

C: "You get your grades and they help you a lot. Just everything here, here like they just help you with everything."

D described how the staff motivated her and made her feel comfortable to ask for help in a way that she hadn't been able to at school:

D: "Dead brilliant. They're really motivating. I mean I think if you don't, if you're not comfortable in doing a course or you're not made to feel in your comfort zone, if it's something, 'cause I'm not very good at maths I really struggle with it but they've all made me, I wouldn't say enjoy it because I don't particularly like it, but I enjoy learning 'cause I'll go away and I know that I've learnt something new and I'll think, actually if I didn't have the motivation and the help off them, I'd just sit there and be like, not understand. But I'm not scared to ask for help now whereas that was my main problem in school I would not ask for help. But they make you feel comfortable where you can say, actually I need help with this."

Some interviewees acknowledged that their attitude to education had changed since they had left school:

D: "My attitude to education then is completely different to my attitude to education now if that makes sense?"

Interviewer: Yeah it does. What was your attitude to education then?

D: "I was just really half soaked. I just thought well I can do it another time. And then I didn't realise what was gonna happen from when I dropped out until when I come back into education."

4.2.2(ii) Training and work

This theme was defined as 'how well young people felt that training and work helps to prepare them for adult life'.

The young people's motivation to work came through strongly in all nine interviews and they all expressed aspirations to get a good or a better job through obtaining qualifications and skills. The benefits of work were described in terms of earning money, doing something worthwhile and developing social relationships with colleagues. Earning money was the most frequently mentioned theme, and seemed to be important not only for enabling young people to support themselves but also for their sense of security and sense of self-worth. For interviewee I, not being paid at her previous placement while working for her Level 1 NVQ had been a factor in causing her to lose the motivation to continue there:

I: "And then with my Costa I enjoyed it but I did it for three months and then like I kind of got a bit bored of not being paid. I was working twenty-five hours a week for free and like..."

Interviewer: Right.

I: "...it was very demanding and I was just like..."

Interviewer: Yes I mean that, that err is a something that is important isn't it? To, to give you some money?

I: "Yeah. It's like, like I didn't mind it for the first couple of months I was just like, but then you kind of just lose motivation 'cause you just think 'what am I actually doing it for' like."

Despite this, she suggested that attending college and gaining work experience had been essential preparation for having a job:

I: "I think, starting off at college was the best thing for me..."

Interviewer: Yeah.

I: "Cause I don't think, I think if I went straight into a job I don't think I would have been ready."

Interviewer: OK.

I: "So doing the work placement helped me build-up my confidence to go for a real job."

Interviewer: Yes.

I: “So definitely having working in Costa and then doing a twelve weeks with another seven people, definitely helps you grow.”

The five young people who were already in work as apprentices were very positive about the support they received from their colleagues and the working environment. As is typical of an apprenticeship model, each apprentice had an immediate line manager and they were appreciative of how their line managers had taken them ‘under their wing’:

Interviewer: ... Erm, is there anything about the setup here, the way erm you know it either the people here or the way erm that sort of err the way the job’s organised that, that helps you?

I: “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Erm, I’ve had [name of line manager] for most of it since like the very first day I started and she’s kind of picked me up and taught me everything she knows.”

Interviewer: Oh OK.

I: “So that was nice ‘cause I, I know I can always go to her like she’s my main person if I need help with anything...”

Interviewer: Right OK.

I: “...I’ll just go and ask her.”

The apprentices also spoke warmly about the support they had received from the Employment Officer from the local authority. He had played a key role in recruiting them to the twelve week initial placement, liaising with their managers, providing mentoring, and being a point of contact to deal with any queries they had.

G: “Yeah definitely [redacted] has, definitely helped I think he was quite positive I think we had erm, we used to have like a mentor meeting every Friday for all of us. And we’d, he’d like ask us if there was anything that we’re not happy with and...”

Interviewer: Yeah.

G: "...what are happy with and he'd write it all down and then as soon as like, as soon as we left he'd, if there was anything we weren't happy with he'd go and sort it and he'd have things sorted and looked into and things like that."

Interviewer: Right.

G: "so I think having him around was brilliant."

E advocated the benefits of learning on the job rather than via a degree, even though she also frequently expressed regret about not going to university:

E: "I thought well it's, it's not really the same you don't really get the same qualifications but you do. You still have respectful grades and qualifications and you also have work experience, you're getting paid..."

Interviewer: Hmmm.

E: "...and I think it's probably a better option than going to uni because for me to go to uni I'd get into thousands of pounds of debt, I'd have no money while I'm there, I'd have to take out student loans and then that's just building up loads of money that's gonna take me years to repay and I've still then left uni with no work experience."

Interviewer: Yes. So...

E: "Whereas I'm here now and I'm doing all, well I'm getting qualifications, I'm getting paid and I've got no debts."

4.2.2(iii) Family and friends

This theme was defined as 'practical and/or emotional support provided to young people by family and friends, now they were in education, employment or training'. All of the young people described with evident pride and relief, that their parents were proud of them now that they were in EET. Relationships which had been under strain during the young person's period of NEET had universally become more positive since s/he had been able to move on in life:

Interviewer: ...what do your nan and your dad think about it?

C: "Proud of me."

Interviewer: Yeah, good.

C: "And they're glad that I'm doing it finally, like doing summat and behaving."

Respondent I had been on the receiving end of some very negative attitudes from her mother and seemed very pleased to have confounded her mother's low expectations:

I: "Just I think... she literally used to just call me a troubled child."

Interviewer: Right OK. Yeah.

I: "Just, it's just one of them."

Interviewer: Yeah so, so she wasn't feeling very happy about...

I: "She didn't just, she basically said to me she didn't think I was gonna do anything in life she just thought 'oh well this is it then you do whatever you wanna do blah, blah, blah'. Being like all that with me."

Interviewer: Right.

I: "And then I've kind of, I've moved out and kind of proved her wrong and she's like 'ooh' like last time I seen her she was like 'I can't believe how well you're doing'."

In terms of friendships, many of the young people felt very positive about the new relationships they had made since returning to education or starting work. They expressed a sense of solidarity through having shared experiences. For B, who said that she felt badly let down by her best friend at school, it was important that she made a new best friend at the training centre:

B: "And you're mixed in with different people it's like before I come here I never knew no one..."

Interviewer: Right.

B: "...never knew my best friend."

Interviewer: Yeah.

B: "Me and her become best friends because we come here and we found out we lived right round the corner from each other."

Interviewer: Oh really well that's even better isn't it?

B: "And we had a lot in common."

Interviewer: Yeah.

B: "And it was just one of them. It helps everyone."

D appreciated being with other parents who understood her situation:

D: "I think they can relate to me because everyone's in the same situation."

Interviewer: Yeah.

D: "So I think everyone's quite understanding."

Interviewer: Yeah.

D: "And they're not judgemental. 'Cause I feel like there's a lot of judgement on, on single parents when they're not working."

Interviewer: Yes.

D: "Obviously 'cause we're all kind of parents, some single some not, they're more understanding to your situation because they know it's not always easy."

Some of the apprentices mentioned the importance of having people of their own age to work with:

Interviewer: Yeah, OK. What about erm, you know the fact that there are other people your age here as well?

I: Yeah I think that helps as well 'cause like you've got people to go lunch with, you make new friends and like you don't feel like you're the only young person in the office."

4.2.3 How society views ‘young people’

4.2.3(i) Being a young employee

The young people who were pursuing education and training did not volunteer any views on ‘how they might be perceived as young employees’. They were not at this stage in their thinking, but rather were focused on increasing their employability. Many of the apprentices commented that obtaining a job with the council was prestigious, particularly in view of their age. However some seemed to be acutely aware of their youth and inexperience as young employees, and expressed an extra sense of responsibility to do well in their apprenticeship because they perceived that their employer had taken a risk in recruiting them. E described the effects of this perceived additional pressure on her and her peers:

E: “Because you feel like, I mean I know the other apprenticeships feel a bit like this as well like, we have more to prove than everyone else ‘cause like we’re young and we’re... They’ve took a chance by investing in us and like having us here so we’ve got a bit more to prove so then when we do something wrong it, it does set you back a bit but you just have to...”

Interviewer: Does it?

E: “Yeah.”

Along with responsibilities to their teams, some apprentices talked about their responsibilities to clients to get things right:

F: "I just, I think especially at like, it's not the pressure of the job but I mean it's people's council tax, I think that's the main, I'm worried about that. 'Cause it's people's, I don't know, lives."

Interviewer: Right. So you feel maybe a sense of responsibility about handling quite, things that are very important to people?

F: Yeah I mean like it's never really seemed important like just, one, one mess up can completely put someone in debt.

4.2.3(ii) Importance of encouragement and support beyond family and friends

This theme was concerned with the 'the value young people placed on the encouragement and support they had received from adults other than their family and friends'. Most of the interviewees had sustained knocks to their self-confidence and optimism as a result of their experiences of being NEET and other adversity. Supportive and encouraging people and environments evidently had a powerful positive impact on them. F seemed amazed that his manager had placed so much trust in him, when he felt that he didn't have the necessary qualifications for his job:

Interviewer: Erm and what, what do you think helped to change this whole situation...?

F: "Erm opportunity and trust."

Interviewer: Really?

F: "I think the main thing. I mean [manager] trusted me. People trusting in me."

Interviewer: OK.

F: "I think I mean this job I, the job that I've got now I shouldn't have sort of thing. I, I haven't got the, near the qualifications to actually be eligible..."

B described how attending the training provider had helped to build up her self confidence and sense of self-worth:

B: *“Basically, it’s helped me being here because like it helps you like find out who you are...”*

Interviewer: *Right.*

B: *“...if you don’t know and everything. And it, and it helps you [inaudible] getting your confidence back up and everything and to not put yourself down about anything. And it basically tells you that everybody’s special in their own way.”*

G described how her family’s comments had contributed to her giving up on herself, but support from the Employment Officer had given her the necessary encouragement to apply for the pre-apprenticeship:

G: *“I think I do, I did need a bit of support I think and then I think when, when I spoke to [name] I think that’s when I definitely did change my mind. I think, I feel, I think like [name] was the one person that sort of had faith in me and...”*

Interviewer: *That’s interesting yeah.*

G: *“...and like he was the one person that I think it, out of anyone he did give me that push like.”*

4.2.3(iii) Stereotypes

I was interested to explore with the interviewees how they thought people in wider society might view their situation at the time they were NEET compared with their current situation. Many respondents perceived that those in wider society might not be particularly sympathetic towards young people who weren’t in education, training or work, but argued that it wasn’t justifiable to make

judgements about young people, without knowing about and understanding their individual circumstances:

F: *"I think a young person on benefits that, that's, that's a stereotype in itself I think."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

F: *"It is, there is a lot of stereotype of like young people and claiming benefits."*

Interviewer: *Yes.*

F: *"Erm and having I don't know children when you're young. Erm and being on Job Seekers Allowance and things like that like there's a lot of stereotypes around...young people claiming benefits."*

Interviewer: *Yes.*

F: *"Erm so I think that would have, that would have affected it but I mean they, they wouldn't have known the back story and they wouldn't have known... 'cause I mean a lot of the stereotype is just that, that as soon as young people hit eighteen they know that they, they can claim the benefit and they don't have to do anything if they don't want to."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

F: *"So I think that's... But I don't know, people do look at situations like they, they sympathise erm..."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

F: *"Even with, with the perfect stereotypical person."*

E: *"'Cause I don't think people realise, I think that they do think that generally teenagers are lazy workers which they can be, I'm not gonna lie we are, and we do wanna go out with our friends but we can't do that without a job so we do realise that we have to have money coming in."*

Interviewer: *Yeah so, it, you think that teenagers would be labelled as being lazy a bit more than you know older workers do you?*

E: *"Yeah. Definitely but I think teenagers will also be more, some of us can be more reliable workers because we want it, like we really do want it."*

Respondents generally thought that they would be perceived in a more positive light since returning to education or obtaining an apprenticeship.

B and F suggested that due to their experiences, they might be a good role model for other young people in a similar situation:

Interviewer: ...how do you think people would see you know erm, in terms of what you're doing?

B: "I think that they would think it's good because like if all the people that dropped out of education and everything did what I'm doing, it is good 'cause it's showing a good erm role model."

For C who had had such a poor experience of school, it appeared important to be sharing the 'normal' experience of being a college student:

Interviewer: So, what about how erm, you'd be seen by the wider society, if, if I were to, to interview somebody in the street and get their views about erm, what you're doing with yourself at the moment?

C: "They'll probably just think I'm a normal person 'cause every child my age is doing, like going to college...and that. Probably just think I'm a normal person then."

4.2.4 Looking to the future

4.2.4(i) Attitude to independence

Many respondents expressed a strong sense that they were at a significant stage in their lives as they began the transition from school to becoming independent adults. Some described gaining confidence from experiences which they thought were helping them to grow up and take responsibility as adults. G said that it had helped her to have to interact with people she didn't know in an office environment:

G: *"But I, I definitely like I think coming out of my comfort zone, being thrown into an office sort of if you, if you wanna put it if, erm, even though I had people around me that I could, that I could speak to I think coming here and not knowing anyone, I think that was the better thing to do. I think 'cause you have to get to know people then like, you have to speak to people..."*

Interviewer: Yes.

G: *"...you have to like, you have to actually go out of your way and grow up sort of thing like."*

Respondent I spoke of the value of having to work for, then manage her money as preparation for adult life:

I: *"Yeah but I definitely like, like I work for my money and then I pay my way. I think that definitely helps you for when you're a little bit older as well."*

Interviewer: Yes, I'm sure.

I: *"'Cause you won't be like 'ooh I've got bills' and like 'cause I already pay for everything myself and then I pay my dad."*

For others, the prospect of becoming an adult evoked ambivalent feelings about being expected to make choices and take responsibility for their lives. Some young people felt that they were being asked to make important life decisions at too young an age, for example C:

Interviewer: *Did you have any ideas when you were you know in that time...*

C: *"No, I didn't actually. Still like thinking now like I wanna do something but what do I wanna do. It's hard to understand what you wanna do at this age."*

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah it is isn't it yeah? How old are you now?

C: *"Seventeen."*

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah and it seems like erm, you know people have been asked to think about it and then...

C: *"Yeah. I got asked to think about it when I was like fourteen and I was like...I haven't got a clue."*

Respondent E found it difficult to adjust to being given more freedom by her mother once she left school, for example in matters such as getting up in the mornings:

E: *"And I think that's a really big thing to take on because all through school all up until year eleven my mum was really strict with me and I know my friends' mums were as well. So then their parents are all being really strict and like they're in control and as soon as we all left school we, they give us just loads of freedom. And then there's like..."*

Interviewer: *Do you think that was too much then?*

E: *"I think, I think it was too much to have all the freedom from my mum and then not having to go to school and going to college is like, it's not the same 'cause as soon as I started going college my mum stopped waking me up in the mornings like, it was down to me to get myself up."*

Interviewer: *Right, yeah.*

E: *"And just little things like that and it's like, it's just become like, it's just become your life if you, I don't know how to explain it..."*

Conversely, F had been pushed into taking on adult responsibilities very young and felt he had missed out on 'normal' life as a teenager, due to having to move into supported housing at the age of sixteen:

F: *"Erm and then I went into supported housing which obviously then it wasn't the greatest to get a job and it wasn't the greatest situation in life erm..."*

Interviewer: *No.*

F: *"...to actually, I don't know just feel like I don't know how to describe it, like a normal person. Like when you go to college you see all these people and they go and they've, they've got their washing done for you, they've well they've got their washing done for them and, and it's all about I know that's obviously when you grow up you, you have to do that*

sort of thing but I mean that was sixteen. I was there. I was just living on my own.”

Some of the apprentices spoke about difficulties with friends who had taken a different path and who didn't understand the demands of their job. Most of E's friends had gone to college and she frequently mentioned the contrast between their experiences and hers (in particular, the constraints arising from the responsibilities of her job):

E: “...most my friends go college so at the minute, well they'll all be breaking up soon so then they've got two weeks off and then to them my job becomes annoying 'cause 'you're in work and we're all off and we wanna do this...”

4.2.4(ii) Optimism

This theme was defined as 'the extent of the young people's hopefulness and confidence about their future'. As one might expect, having secured employment with training for two years, the apprentices expressed the most positive and hopeful views about their future. Despite the difficult climate for jobs, the apprentices in particular seemed to regard themselves as having choices in what they did in the future. E wanted to leave her options open:

E: “I think I've changed my future plans now. I don't...”

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

E: “...yeah I don't think I'd say, I don't know exactly what I want to do in the future. I think for the minute I'm enjoying what I'm doing...”

Interviewer: Yes.

E: "...and I can, I wanna see where that takes me. And if I find out after this apprenticeship that maybe I don't wanna work in an office and just, I can try something new."

F had been pessimistic about his chances of finding work without qualifications, but obtaining the apprenticeship had shown him that his lack of qualifications need not define his career pathway:

F: "Yeah, yeah I think I know that I'm not err a lost cause. I'm not erm, I'm not the qualification on the bit of paper I'm the person and that the qualification doesn't make me and doesn't choose what I do, I choose what I do sort of thing."

Interviewer: Yes. Yeah does that erm some, sort of cause for hope for you?

F: "Yeah 'cause I always thought that your qualifications, everyone looks at your qualifications and that, that can be the decider right there."

Interviewer: Hmmm. It's interesting isn't it?

F: "And obviously 'cause I'm so young I haven't got that much experience."

Interviewer: Hmmm.

F: "So that is literally all they have to go on."

E spoke about the opportunities for progression offered by her employer:

Interviewer: I mean what, what erm what else will, would help you?

E: "Definitely the help the help that I get from my supervisors, my colleagues and definitely my line manager 'cause they're all really supportive and erm, willing to help us progress and like I think that's what they want for us just as much as we do ourselves as well. Like they're all constantly reminding us that if we do wanna progress and we do wanna learn more then we're more than welcome just to say like 'is there any chance that we could be like trained on that as well'."

Interviewer: Hmmm.

4.2.4(iii) Insecurity

The definition for this theme was 'young people express fear, worry, or unease about the future'. There was a general view that suitable jobs were in short supply and that being young and inexperienced were barriers to finding work. C said that she would like to do an apprenticeship, possibly working with children, but she had a lot of worries about getting a job:

C: *"Yeah. Definitely worried about the future. Definitely."*

Interviewer: *OK. Erm can you explain a bit more?*

C: *"Cause I just don't know what's gonna happen in the future. Like, it's just hard to know what's gonna happen...like anything could happen in the future now."*

Interviewer: *Do you mean in terms of jobs or...?*

C: *"Jobs and money. There's not a lot of jobs going anymore. Especially with like the age, age range round here like."*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

C: *"Young people have the hardest to get a job because they've no experience."*

D described times when she experienced self-doubt and uncertainty about her future:

D: *"...and then sometimes I worry that I'm not gonna get where I want to get to..."*

Interviewer: *Right yeah.*

D: *"...and what I want to be doing. Like I feel like sometimes it's not possible kind of thing but obviously I'm hopeful this course has kind of motivated me to be doing something every week 'cause it's given me a bit more routine so it's made me optimistic that it can be done but then I'm, I do kind of doubt myself and go back. So it's kind of a circle if that makes sense?"*

4.3 Being ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET)

The definition developed for the global theme ‘being NEET’ is ‘young people’s views about the impact of being ‘not in education, employment or training’ on their lives’. I did not specifically use the acronym ‘NEET’ with the young people, and none of them seemed to be aware of it. However it was evident from the strength of the feelings expressed and the sense of immediacy in the young peoples’ accounts, that being NEET had impacted significantly on them, and was continuing to influence their perceptions in the present. It is of course difficult to ascertain how closely the respondents’ views corresponded to their actual feelings and thoughts at the time, because they were being asked to reflect ‘in hindsight’, and people continue to actively process and try to ‘make sense’ of their life experiences in order to construct their stories.

Three main themes were identified in the global theme ‘being NEET’:

- **Impact on personal identity**
- **Significant relationships**
- **School experience**

Figure 4.2 on page 140 shows the thematic map for ‘being NEET’, and Table 4.2 overleaf shows the subordinate themes associated with each main theme.

Table 4.2: Relationship between the main themes and subordinate themes for being ‘not in education, employment or training’

Global Theme: Being NEET	
Main themes	Subordinate themes
Impact on personal identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Coping strategies ii. Degree of ‘fit’ with the young person’s hopes and aspirations iii. Other adverse life events iv. Turning points
Significant relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Family ii. Friends iii. Professional support
School experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Feelings about school ii. Progress at school (learning and/or behaviour) iii. Help provided



Figure 4.2: Final thematic map showing global theme: being 'not in education, employment or training'

4.3.1 Impact on personal identity

The definition developed for this main theme is ‘young people describe the NEET experience specifically in terms of the effects it had on their thoughts and feelings about themselves and their sense of who they are as individuals’.

Under this umbrella theme, four subordinate themes were identified from the interview transcripts: **‘coping strategies’**; **‘degree of ‘fit’ with the young person’s hopes and aspirations’**; **‘other adverse life events’** and **‘turning points’**. Each of these is described in turn, with examples of the young peoples’ responses.

4.3.1(i) Coping strategies

The definition developed for this subordinate theme was ‘the specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, used by the young people to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimise the impact of being NEET’. Most described themselves as proactively making efforts to look for work or to think differently about this experience. Some mentioned their efforts to develop a more positive personal outlook, for example D:

D: “Because even though I still felt these things I felt, I found ways of dealing with it kind of thing like I, like there was less arguments because I held things in more huum, and I tried I was like, this was when I started maybe being a bit more helpful and happy because I tried to make more time for my family, like I’d save money if he give me bits of money I’d save it so I could go and travel to see my family or my dad would come and pick me up of a weekend. Erm, and I was just constantly hoping that things would eventually get better.”

The desire to be 'doing something' was a strong feeling for most of the young people. Interviewee E commented:

E: "And then at that point I wasn't really bothered about getting a job to make money I was more bothered about actually doing something."

E took short courses to occupy her time and in order to improve her CV:

Interviewer: Was there anything else that you, you tried to do erm to get out of the situation?

E: "I'd done little bits and bobs at college like I'd erm, they were just week courses like..."

Interviewer: So that's the thing you were talking about, first aid and stuff like that?

E: "...yeah just stuff like that. Just stuff to erm get a certificate...."

Interviewer: Keep going? So you were trying to build your CV by the sound of it, yeah?

E: "Yeah just so I, wasn't doing nothing really. I'd rather go out just even like some days I was only in college for an hour..."

Despite their efforts to think and behave positively, applying for jobs and having no success was clearly energy sapping, dispiriting and de-motivating for many interviewees:

H: "And then I, I was just fed-up because I was like I'd sat there and done my CV for hours and stuff and then tried to do erm, apply online and stuff for things and no one was even trying to like say no. And then I just, and then I was stressed because just thought I'd be sitting on, at home all for the rest of my life."

4.3.1(ii) Degree of 'fit' with the young person's hopes and aspirations

This subordinate theme is defined as 'the extent to which young people thought that their NEET situation matched with their hopes and plans'. In response to the question how being NEET fitted with what they hoped to do with their lives, seven out of the nine respondents said that it didn't fit with what they had anticipated for themselves. Some of them described their aspirations to have a good job, such as respondent F:

Interviewer: *Err how did it fit with you know what, what, how you thought your life was gonna turn out?*

F: *"It didn't, didn't really fit very well. Erm, I always thought I was quite confident and I thought I was relaxed and, and motivated and, and I would get somewhere in life I would not just be erm, I don't know how to word it 'cause it sounds bad. Sort of I wouldn't be in Asda...stacking shelves. I wouldn't be, I wouldn't have like a normal job I'd have an exceptionally good job."*

Interviewer: *Yes.*

F: *"I would, I would always strive to achieve that job."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

F: *"I don't know what it was, I don't know what the job would have been but I mean I've always thought that. But I mean even looking at it now I've still, I, I think I've got an exceptionally good job in the circumstances so I mean I think it has worked out it's all still come together."*

E and G outlined the significant mismatch between their expectations and the NEET situation they found themselves in:

E: *"...everyone had always been like 'oh you'll do this like you'll go so far' and then all of a sudden I'm just doing nothing and I think it was just a bit sad that that was how I felt like I was gonna turn out."*

G: *"I think it was just completely like the opposite of what I thought would ever happen."*

Only one respondent explicitly reflected that at the time she didn't have any ideas about what she wanted to do in the future:

Interviewer: *Yeah. Erm and then thinking back to that time how, how did what you were doing at that time fit with any sort of ideas for the future with what you hoped to do with your life?*

I: *"I didn't really have any. I, I, I literally I used to say to my mum 'Oh I don't care I'll just have a job stacking shelves in a shop'."*

Interviewer: *Right.*

I: *"Like I had no ambition whatsoever! Like when I dropped out of college I thought 'Oh I'll just work in a shop.'"*

4.3.1(iii) Other adverse life events

This subordinate theme is defined as 'significant life difficulties described by young people in addition to being NEET'. I categorised NEET itself as an 'adverse life event' as it was evident from these young peoples' descriptions that this was a stressful experience. Other significant life difficulties volunteered by seven of the nine respondents were: being thrown out the family home by a parent and becoming homeless, a girlfriend's overdose, the death of a parent, being excluded from or dropping out of school, suffering from depression, having a miscarriage, being very isolated due to moving to a new area, or being expected by a partner to stay at home. There was frequently a perception that these additional pressures had contributed to their becoming NEET and/or to have aggravated their difficulties.

Respondent E described how when she was sixteen, her father had been diagnosed with cancer and given six months to live:

E: "Err I went into school and like spoke to my head teacher and just said would I be able to study from home. So I started studying erm from home like to be with my dad and then after he died I didn't go back to school I just did my exams, I just went in for my exams. And then I had the six weeks off and then I went to college well sixth form at my school for about, September I was, I was there for about a month and a half and then I ended up leaving there and then I was out of college and no work and my mom was getting really frustrated because I did do really well in school, I got like mainly A stars."

E then talked about the effect that her father's death had on her attitude to being in school, which in turn changed the choices she made:

E: "I think erm, yeah it had a major impact because my dad like, I was always the brains of the family as my dad would call me so like, I suppose having to be in a school environment which was always a reminder of him was, that was quite...was quite difficult and as well I think the worst thing is, the thing I regret the most about not actually staying at college is because I left my sixth form first originally because the poems we was doing was a book of poems that erm a son had wrote for his father and his grandfather. So that was like, and it was still quite fresh in my mind then so it was quite emotional."

Interviewee F, who had become homeless after his mother threw him out, expressed the fear of developing a mental illness:

F: "I'd have good days and bad days erm, I don't know, I used to, I used to be scared that, that I'd be, I'd put myself in this situation and now I feel depressed that I, I used to think that wasn't a normal thing and that, that it's me showing a sign of going like, having a mental illness and things like that, so I used to get scared of that."

4.3.1(iv) Turning points

A powerful subordinate theme in some of the narratives was that of the young person describing 'a significant moment or point at which they perceived their lives differently and were galvanised into making changes'. This process was often explained in terms of the young person's inner dialogue with her or himself. Interviewee G described the moment that she heard about the twelve week pre-apprenticeship opportunity:

G: *"Yeah I think it just, summat just clicked in my mind and I just thought if I don't do it now I'll never do it like."*

D perceived that she needed to take advantage of a window of opportunity to return to education:

D: *"I think it's kind of the point, I pushed myself to the point of having to do it now...I've always put off going back into education, always...and it just come to the point where I thought 'I need to do it now'. Obviously 'cause I'm getting older and then when my daughter starts school, if I don't do something now I'm gonna find it really difficult to get back into anything."*

Respondent B wasn't sure why she had reached a personal turning point but thought it might have been due to an improvement in her emotional state:

B: *"Eventually yeah. I turned and I thought, I'm wanna, I'm not gonna let people knock me down no more I'm gonna do what I wanna do and if they don't like it they don't, they don't have to be around me."*

Interviewer: Yeah.

B: *"So I got up and I found this place."*

Interviewer: *So, so what, what erm, what, what made that happen do you think, what was that all about?*

B: *"I don't know I think like I'd gone through my depressing state and everything and I got all my emotions out..."*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

B: *"...and after it must have just been time for me to get back into action."*

4.3.2 Significant relationships

This main theme was defined as 'practical and/or emotional support provided to young people by family, friends and professionals'. 'Family' and 'friends' were differentiated into two subordinate themes, since they appeared to offer somewhat different forms of support.

4.3.2(i) Family

There was no doubt from the accounts of all nine young people about being NEET that what their family thought and how they behaved at this time mattered greatly. All described parental involvement as influential, whether this was positive or negative. Positive support provided by parents included practical help such as providing financial support, board and lodging, and phoning colleges, and emotional help such as keeping in contact, and reframing events in positive terms to give encouragement and hope to the young person.

E: *"Erm well I think it was a lot of family that helped me like definitely yeah. It was like me and my family grew very close through it."*

Interviewer: *can you think of anybody at that time who, who, who just tried to help you?*

B: *"My family did."*

Interviewer: *Right yeah. What did they do?*

B: *"They kept telling me it's not the end and everything, 'you'll find somewhere else' and that 'don't worry about it'."*

H: *"Hmmm. I think, I think she tried to be helpful like she'd say 'ahh you know you need to this, you need to do this' and like I was but she kept saying it and it was a bit annoying but I know she was trying."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

H: *"And then like when I was saying, moaning about 'em not getting back to me she'd be like 'yeah well at least you're trying', like keep trying."*

Family involvement which was regarded as being less helpful or even detrimental included nagging, becoming impatient, angry or stressed, not speaking to the young person, having arguments, putting the young person down, and in extreme cases, throwing the young person out of the house. It was evident from all of the young people that their situation put family relationships under strain:

C: *"...dad would fall out with me and so would nan. They wouldn't speak to me 'cause I was just sitting there doing nothing."*

Interviewer: *Yeah..*

C: *"I started to get angry with it. I was always sad. I was definitely sad when, when like my nan and my dad stopped speaking to me."*

I: *"Like me mum, like when I wanted to leave beauty when I dropped out of that me and my mum had a massive argument about that 'cause..."*

Interviewer: *Did you?*

I: *"Yeah cause she was like 'what you gonna do blah, blah, blah' like that...that kind of thing..."*

Some of the young people recognised that help was offered by family members but they had not wanted it:

B: *"But I didn't want their help. I refused it."*

Interviewer: *Right.*

B: *"Refused to listen because...at the end of the day to me it did seem it was all snatched from me. And everything and I didn't think it would get any, ever get any better."*

In two cases, the influence of a partner was important. Interviewee F had been in a serious relationship with his girlfriend for over a year. Like him, she had significant family and personal problems which eventually led to them both moving from their home town to some of her relatives in this borough. F was currently reliant on a member of his girlfriend's family for accommodation as he was sleeping on their sofa.

Interviewee D had moved in with her boyfriend at the age of sixteen and had subsequently had a child (planned) with him, but they had split up after six years because of his lack of support and his controlling behaviour when she wanted to become more independent and find work. D described the 'chilling' effect of her partner's attitude on her self-confidence and motivation:

D: *"Yeah definitely. I think it's basically because erm my ex-partner constantly put me down about education and just going out in general, he was quite controlling."*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

D: *"So I think like I never had it in me then to just think 'actually I'm not gonna listen to you, I'm gonna get up and do something'. So I just kind of got stuck in the same routine nearly for six years."*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

D: *"So it was quite a long relationship."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm.*

D: *"So that definitely didn't help at all. But then as soon as we split up then erm I found it in myself just to... and not long after I started the course."*

For D, becoming a parent had been a very positive experience but she recognised that it had necessitated putting her plans on hold:

D: "But then obviously when she came along like it just, it was completely different then really. I was like really happy obviously and it gave me something new to focus on. So then like it kind of took my mind off everything. But then, yet again it put everything else at a standstill."

4.3.2(ii) Friends

The young peoples' views about the role of their friends varied. Some spoke appreciatively about practical and or emotional support that friends had provided:

Interviewer: OK. Erm, and what about your friends at this time?

H: "They actually, well they, they was helpful because when I was looking for jobs at that point so was them two. So we'd do it together."

One respondent described the barriers to seeing her friends because she'd moved away from the area and was quite isolated:

D: "I didn't have the money to keep going to see them and they, none of them, they were my age as well and a lot of them was in just college they wasn't getting money so they couldn't afford to come and see me. So it was just like another cycle really, none of us could really..."

F needed his friends to stay but commented that they had no real understanding of how difficult his situation was in supported housing:

F: *"Like no one really quite understood, 'cause sort of like my friends and that they thought it was like a really cool thing that I, I sort of had my own flat and, and it wasn't, when sort of you have to put where you live and that's like a 'cause err, I mean in [town] it's quite small so it's, it's quite a known, because a lot of people come out of prison and go in there..."*

Interviewer: *Yeah, yeah.*

F: *"...So it's not the greatest thing to put on like on a CV of where you live and things like that. Erm, so I mean they saw it as, as a good thing and things like that, used to and...and I didn't like being alone. So that was my main, I just didn't they, they was sort of the lonely nights I didn't like that just on my own like I'd always have a friend to stay."*

Others expressed ambivalent views about their friends – although they were perceived as helpful with providing somewhere to stay if things weren't going well at home, they encouraged the young person to make poor choices:

Interviewer: *Yeah OK so, so was there anything about you at the time that was helping?*

I: *"Erm, I suppose my, I don't know 'cause I say my friends but then my friends were kind of not helping as well."*

Interviewer: *Oh OK.*

I: *"They were kind of just the same as me, leading me along, encouraging me to do bad things...as well. Kind of got lead astray a little bit."*

Interviewer: *So what, what were they doing that was helping?*

I: *"Erm getting me away from my mom a lot!"*

Interviewer: *OK.*

I: *"Obviously like giving me somewhere to sleep."*

Interviewer: *Yeah, was that what was happening, you were staying out a lot and...?*

I: *"Yeah I stayed out a lot at my friends always used to like, used to go to their house, used to let me sleep there, feed me and then my best friend at the time, I did actually do the same course as her so that helped me but then at the same time it didn't because I was spending that much time with her I didn't realise what I was doing to my mom."*

4.3.2(iii) Professional support

The majority of the young people told me that they had received some form of professional support during their period of NEET. Many were appreciative of the help they had received from the Specialist Careers Service in identifying and contacting suitable work opportunities and educational placements:

Interviewer: *Yeah OK. So erm, and then the Connexions person what do you think err...?*

C: *"She helped me straight away. She was straight on the phone..."*

Some of the young people spoke in positive terms about mentors at school or college who offered support and encouragement.

Respondent E had done a course at the Prince's Trust and had found this very helpful in developing her employability skills:

E: *"It's a lot about, it's basic knowledge which I already had but it's a lot of confidence building and..."*

Interviewer: *Is it?*

E: *"...yeah I mean it teaches you a lot about jobs and how to go into an interview and how to..."*

Interviewer: *Oh I see.*

E: *"Which is a lot of information that's really just necessary to have but you don't really get taught..."*

E: *"...I think that was something that I definitely do, well it definitely helped me yeah because I without that I don't think I would have actually got this job, well I don't think I would have."*

However, E said that she had not told any of her then friends about going to the Prince's Trust, and explained that organisations such as the Prince's Trust and the Careers Service had a 'bad name' among the young people she knew, because they were viewed as being places of 'last resort' for those with no prospects. This suggested that the image of a service might influence the likelihood of it being taken up by young people.

The interviewees held a range of views about the subject of being on benefits. Two of the three young people at the training centre (respondents A and B), told me that they received some money for attending the course and they reported that this was helpful. Respondent D told me that she was on benefits but she was very keen to find work. By contrast, two of the interviewees felt negative about the idea of being on benefits. Respondent F described the stigma he felt about being on benefits:

Interviewer: *Why did you feel embarrassed?*

F: *"Erm, I don't know. I was, I was in the benefit system at the age of sixteen, on Income Support."*

Interviewer: *OK.*

F: *"That was, that was a little bit embarrassing just because no one else had that sort of had that."*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

F: *"They either had sort of a job or they had their, their parents to sort of help them out."*

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

F: *"Erm, so that was hard I mean I did try to apply for college and things and it just, I stopped the application 'cause it was just I, I felt embarrassed even just to put, because I mean there's additional support for people that are on Income Support err financially."*

E explained why she hadn't claimed any benefits when she was NEET:

Interviewer: ...erm I mean did you claim any, did you try and claim any.....benefits or anything?

E: "No. No. Like I knew if I started claiming benefits and I had some sort of income then I would lose more motivation."

Interviewer: Really? So, so you thought that that would actually erm not help you, you know if you'd done that?

E: "Yeah."

Interviewer: That's interesting.

E: "Yeah definitely 'cause I think at my age one of the main focal points is just having money so you can go out and you can..."

Interviewer: Yeah.

E: "...just do things and then if I've got an income coming for doing nothing then I'm not gonna do something to get..."

From an EP perspective it was interesting to ascertain if anyone had received psychological support such as counselling or mentoring, and what they thought of such support. Three respondents (C, D and E) mentioned being offered or receiving counselling but they did not hold very positive views of its value. For C the counselling was through school, and she perceived that the counsellor was helpful initially but 'gave up' on her due to her behaviour difficulties; for D the suggestion by her GP that she might benefit from counselling was the catalyst for her to 'snap herself out of it'; and for E, although she attended sessions she didn't find them useful. Respondent F said that he received student counselling at school which he found helpful. He also spoke about being admitted to hospital overnight in a state of crisis after hearing about his girlfriend's overdose. It had helped him to talk to a professional about his feelings:

F: "But I mean once I'd done that and once I'd, I'd got all that off my chest and I knew that I didn't have to hold it in and hide it I was, I felt fine."

4.3.3 School experience

Experience at school was an important main theme, which is not surprising given that the young people were talking about a significant life transition from school to their lives beyond. Three subordinate themes were evident in the transcriptions: **‘feelings about school’**; **‘progress at school (learning/behaviour)’**; and **‘help provided’**.

4.3.3(i) Feelings about school

I discussed with the young people how they felt about their time at school. E held generally positive views as she had got on well with the teachers and was academically able. I had the strong impression that she would have continued at school and onto higher education had it not been for her father’s death. The remaining eight interviewees expressed predominantly negative feelings about school, for various reasons. Respondent B said that she was angry, frustrated and disappointed with the school’s reaction following her fight with another student, while respondent C felt that her learning suffered and she experienced social isolation due to being excluded from three schools due to her behaviour:

B: “...I was frustrated because, ‘cause because everybody let me down and it felt like to me, like the school did and everything. All my friends did. I thought they were gonna be there for, for me for everything and they never, they all left me.”

Interviewer: Right.

B: “And that goes in with disappointed as well.”

Interviewer: Yeah.

B: “Angry because I thought it wasn’t fair that it had, it happened to me.”

Interviewer: *Right.*

B: *"Yeah I wasn't the best student but, but I wasn't the worst."*

C: *"School was a joke. School is an absolute joke."*

Interviewer: *So really it just sounds like it really was a bit of a, it didn't work?*

C: *"No. School didn't work one bit."*

C: *"I hated school, I absolutely hated it."*

Respondent A stated that she hadn't been happy at school:

A: *"Cause I didn't do no work and there was hardly any teachers."*

Respondent C described how teachers didn't really understand her point of view:

C: *"The teachers just treated you like you were a little baby really like..."*

Interviewer: *OK.*

C: *"...always, just I don't know. Just the way they treat you it was, I just hated it and it just... always treated you like you was a ten year old and always telling you what to do and where to go and it was just... They'd never understand you either if you tried saying anything they'd say 'yeah I'm gonna sort it' and they never did. They never understood where you're coming from."*

In other cases, the negative feelings about school were less intense and were associated with loss of motivation in relation to the work and being unable to earn money (G), or still feeling treated like a child at sixth form (H):

G: *"Erm, so yeah I did wanna, I did wanna really focus on sixth form I did really feel motivated at the beginning and then, I don't know summat just, I can't remember. But summat just clicked and I didn't wanna do it anymore."*

Interviewer: *Hmmm, hmmm.*

G: *"I just felt like it wasn't for me. I think, I think because as well it, it took up most of my time which means I couldn't work, which means I had to go on and do it with no money."*

H: *"I don't know like erm, when 'cause when I was in school they said 'when you go to sixth form it's like the, we, err if you act like an adult we treat you like an adult' whatever, but like I, I, I'd act as an adult but they'd still talk down to you like you're a little kid."*

Interviewer: *OK. Yeah.*

H: *"Which I didn't like."*

4.3.3(ii) Progress at school

I did not specifically ask the young people for details of their attainment at school, but there was a difference on this dimension between those who attended the training centre and the apprentices. The former had lower levels of formal qualifications overall than the latter, having left school without GCSEs or with poor GCSE grades. This was the case for only one of the apprentices. The other four had higher qualifications: three had nine or more GCSEs and one had BTEC qualifications.

Problems with learning and/or behaviour were frequently mentioned. A said that she would have liked to go onto sixth form but the school refused because she had failed all her exams. C attributed some of her difficulties with learning, to the disruption in her education arising from repeated exclusions:

C: *"I haven't really had an education either way 'cause I was always getting kicked out of schools and it would take months to get into a school and then to get..."*

Interviewer: Yeah so, err.

C: *"I reckon properly, the only education I properly had was in year seven and eight."*

Interviewer: Really?

C: *"Yeah. I failed all of my exams like I still had to go in for my exams and I went in for my exams and failed 'em."*

D commented that going into a relationship with her partner had affected her progress:

D: *"Erm I didn't do very well, because in the last term I got with my ex-partner before I left secondary school, not long before and so I didn't study as much for my GCSEs, so I didn't do as well as I would have liked erm..."*

4.3.3(iii) Help provided

Although the majority of the interviewees did not feel that their time at school had been positive, it was interesting that only one young person (B) could find nothing positive to say about the help provided at school. In most cases, a specific member of staff was mentioned as taking an interest in the young person's overall welfare and going out of their way to offer support and encouragement. Interviewee F described the help provided by the Head of Key Stage 4, having been thrown out of his home the previous day:

F: *"Yeah he took me to the housing office and said that we'll sort it now because, because he said he didn't want me to go and leave school..."*

Interviewer: Yes.

F: "...at the end of the day because he can only be there sort of thing for the, for the period that he's in the school and he can only help me when he's in the school."

Interviewer: Yeah, so, so it, so before you, you actually did leave he, he helped then?

F: "Yeah he made, he made sure that I had the contacts erm..."

Even C, who seemed very angry about her school experience, acknowledged that some teachers had tried to help her:

C: "I'd say [school name] teachers tried to help me the most. Probably say [school name] [inaudible] 'cause they tried to keep me in there as much as they possibly could."

Interviewer: Right OK.

C: "But it was always up and down at that school."

Interviewer: Yeah, was there any, any particular teacher or you know like tutor group or...

C: "Yeah there was, I had like we had heads of houses and I'd say like my head of house Mr L he was the one who helped me through everything the most."

Interviewer: Right OK so...

C: "Mr G as well."

Interviewer: Yeah so, so that made a difference a good head of house, erm..

C: "My head teacher was always there as well to be honest."

When I asked C what would have helped to make things better for her at school, she mentioned more one-to-one learning, possibly being moved to a 'behaviour school' with fewer people, and trying to change herself. However C expressed doubt that her trying to change would have changed the behaviour of the teachers. C was also very critical that the local Council did not provide more help to her and her family with trying to find a new school each time that she was permanently excluded.

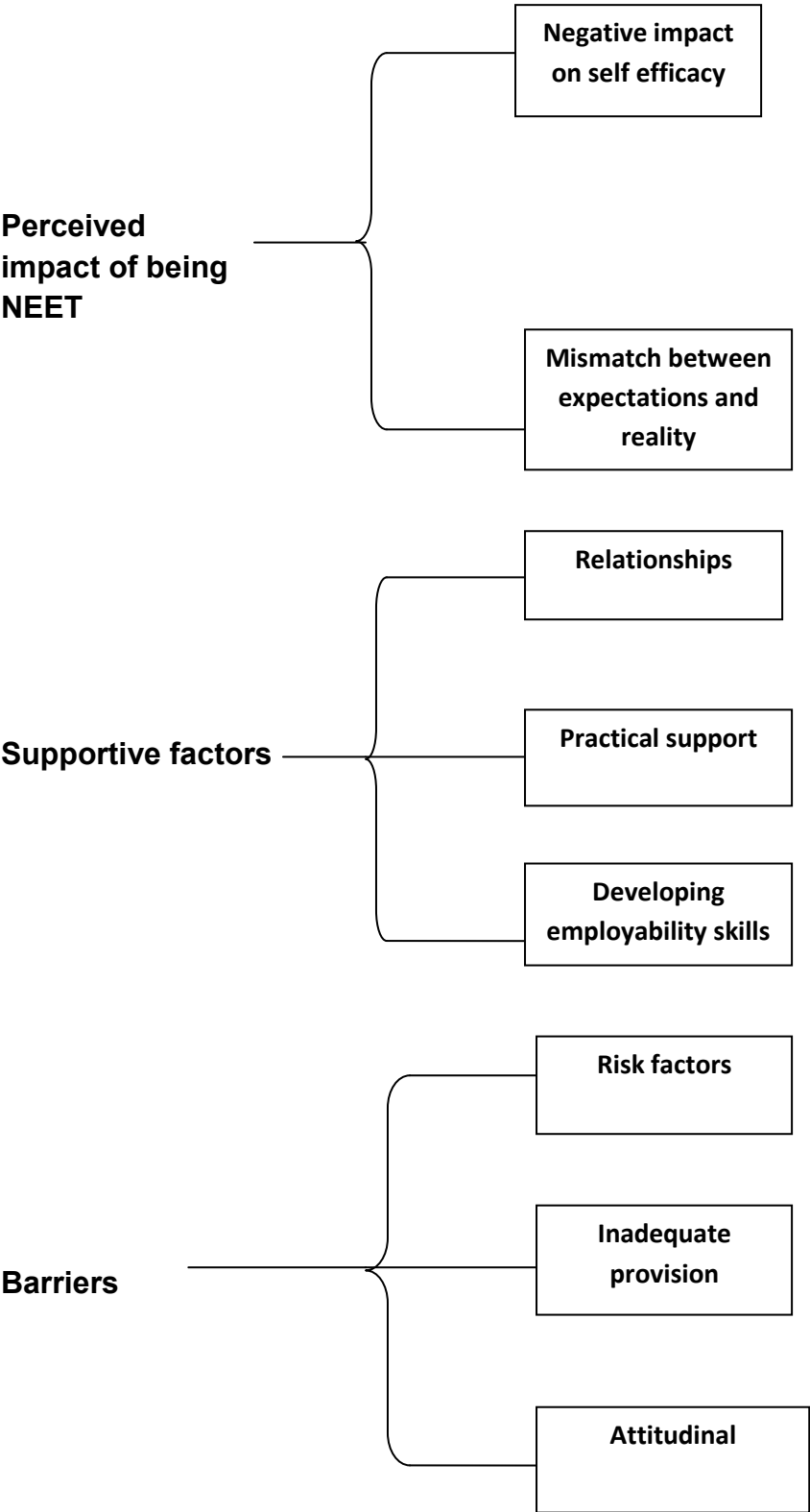
4.4 Views of professionals

4.4.1 Overview

As outlined in the previous chapter, my reason for interviewing the four adults working in various professional capacities with young people who had been NEET, was to triangulate their perspectives with those of the young people and with one another in order to look for overlapping and contrasting themes. These discussions provided me with valuable information about the broader context in which these professionals worked, and also some insights based on their experiences, of factors which are supportive or a hindrance to young people who are or have been NEET.

Following the process of analysis described in section 3.6 of Chapter Three, I produced a 'network analysis' to summarise the main and subordinate themes in the professionals' accounts (figure 4.3). This was supplementary to my primary focus on the young people's subjective experiences.

Figure 4.3: Network analysis of the main and subordinate themes identified in the interviews with professionals



I was struck by the professionals' commitment to understanding the needs of young people who had been NEET, and endeavouring to provide support in their various professional capacities. J commented on the pride and satisfaction she and her team felt about the progress being made by the apprentices:

J: "I think...me and the managers, we're like proud mother hens in a way...it's far more personal, far more personal than any other member of staff, the fact that we, we want them to do well, and I love hearing good stories about them...and you know, this was about, growing our own, and I hope we keep them all."

4.4.2 Perceived impacts on young people of being NEET

The young people focused mainly on their personal experiences of being NEET, rather than talking about how young people in this situation might be perceived generally. However some mentioned stereotypes held about young people who were NEET, for example that their situation was a deliberate choice reflecting personal shortcomings such as laziness and lack of effort.

In comparison, the responses of the professionals drew on their generic experience of young people in NEET circumstances. L and M both had what might be termed strategic roles in the Local Authority to provide support for young people who are NEET, and they made the important point which is reflected in the literature and in the young people I interviewed, that the term describes a very diverse group in terms of circumstances and needs. They gave examples of young people in NEET circumstances having diverse qualifications,

ambitions, school experience, social background, level of disadvantage and so on. M commented that the make-up of the NEET population can vary within local areas and between councils. L and M emphasised that it was therefore crucial to treat each young person as an individual and to avoid making assumptions about their knowledge, attitudes, skills, family support and so on.

While recognising that the NEET population is very diverse and that young people are NEET for a range of reasons, the professionals agreed that it was generally more of a negative than a positive experience for young people. This was borne out by the comments of the young people. L stated that the experience of being frequently rejected often resulted in young people becoming de-motivated and hopeless. K described the negative impact of being NEET on young people's self esteem, which in some cases presented as misbehaviour in the training provider. J identified that when the young people started their pre-apprenticeships they did not have the necessary skills to equip them for work, such as the appropriate behaviour, attitudes and presentation, which she thought might be due to a combination of 'hang-ups' from school and the experience of being NEET. M noted that some young people, particularly young men, experienced depression and anxiety, which for some was in reaction to their situation, but for others reflected a more long-term problem. All commented that a lot of young people had unrealistic expectations about life after school and were unprepared for the challenges they would face in finding suitable work, training or education courses. These points also featured in the young people's interviews.

4.4.3 Supportive factors

There was a strong measure of agreement between the professionals about the core features of good support for young people. They highlighted the fundamental importance of building a relationship with the young person and recognised that this would in some cases be a lengthy and labour intensive process requiring a flexible approach from the adult concerned. This process entailed listening to and trying to understand the young person's needs, making efforts to identify the young person's goals, providing individually tailored support such as mentoring, and sometimes acting as an intermediary between the young person and the work, training or education provider.

J told me that a key element in the success of the young people who followed pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships in her department had been the mentoring and support provided by the employment officer L, who acted as a 'critical friend' at 'arms length' from the employer, but who was also able to liaise with the employer if required. K stated that the small environment in their training centre made it easier for staff to get to know individual students and helped them to feel more secure. M spoke of a promising outreach approach currently being piloted by the Specialist Careers Service, in collaboration with several agencies. This aims to identify where young people live, in order to target those most in need of support through interventions such as mentoring. He also outlined how the approach adopted by his service had become more focused. In their face to face work with young people, advisors had moved away from saying 'we'll do everything for you', towards encouraging the young person

to take more responsibility. This entailed advisors being clear about what they could offer and challenging young people more often.

Many of the young people also spoke of valuing the support from a range of professionals while they were NEET and since they had moved on to work, college or training.

A second core element outlined by the professionals was providing practical support to the young person, for example, helping with costs such as transport, lunch, clothes for work and interviews and so on. Having a wage or some financial help with attending college was described as motivating both by the professionals and many of the young people. K commented that such help increased the likelihood of the student attending and being able to learn.

A third core element was supporting young people with developing the appropriate employability skills, such as good communication, attitudes to work, self presentation, ability to work as part of a team, and achieving a balance between being able to work independently and seeking support when needed. The professionals recognised the need to explicitly teach young people such skills rather than to assume that they knew them. Most of the young people also highlighted their need to learn, not only in the sense of gaining qualifications but also learning to be in a work environment. The impact of families in terms of helping or hindering young people to make the transition from school to adult life was mentioned by J, K, and L and again, was reflected in the comments made by the young people.

4.4.4 Barriers

The professionals described barriers at a number of levels for young people trying to navigate life beyond school, and the stories of the young people bore this out. At the individual and family level, numerous factors were identified by the professionals which it was felt operated singly and in combination, to increase a young person's risk of becoming NEET. Difficulties with family relationships, family finances, mental health and learning difficulties, and poor experiences of school were suggested as examples of risk factors, with a minority of those in the NEET group experiencing multiple problems. M noted that this latter group presented particular challenges for support agencies, as they were often very difficult to contact and engage with.

L and M suggested that a concerted approach was needed to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET at an earlier stage while they were still at school, based on their educational history. They stated that tracking of young people was good while they remained in school, but poor once they left school, and therefore better data sharing was needed between school and post-16 agencies.

The perspectives of the young people and the professionals differed in one important respect. The young people were much more ready to attribute their circumstances in becoming NEET to issues of personal responsibility, for example blaming their situation on their own poor choices and lack of motivation or ambition. The professionals on the other hand, generally seemed to hold the

view that becoming NEET was a situation which went well beyond individual characteristics and was due to the complex interplay of many different factors in the young person's environment. Their analysis placed greater responsibility on wider society and the opportunities it provides for young people when they leave school.

All the professionals were critical of the provision locally and nationally to help young people access education, training and work, after leaving school. They characterised it as a fragmented and confusing patchwork of initiatives, with many different providers, and lots of gaps. They themselves reported difficulty in keeping up to date with this landscape, and stated that it was even more challenging for young people to know where to access help and information about the options available. These themes were again evident in the accounts of the young people. Although they had general goals for their lives, the pathways they took to arrive at their current situation sounded fluid, largely unplanned and heavily influenced by family and friends, life events and chance factors, such as finding out about the pre-apprenticeship opportunity by word of mouth from a friend. Being NEET of course is not something that the majority of young people plan.

The NEET label was judged to be particularly unhelpful in influencing the perceptions of prospective employers. L commented that much of his time was spent trying to combat the narrow and stereotyped assumptions made by employers about NEETs. There was a view that employers such as councils

had a social responsibility to offer work opportunities to young people who had been NEET.

K and L highlighted some of the attitudinal and bureaucratic barriers that made it more difficult for employers to place young people who were NEET. They pointed out that the Government is considering giving employers the funding rather than outside providers such as colleges and training centres, which would require employers to oversee the bureaucracy involved. K and L suggested that this might be manageable for large employers, but too onerous for small businesses and the self-employed, with the attendant risks of creating too many reasons not to take on a young person, or the money being diverted elsewhere.

However there was realistic acknowledgement from the professionals that some young people presented a considerable challenge to employers and required very high levels of commitment and support if they were to have a chance of being successful. J explained that a previous initiative in her department to take on apprentices had been unsuccessful as they had simply required too much management time, and this experience had made her more wary of taking on another group of young people.

K, L and M expressed concern about the dwindling opportunities for the NEET groups with the most challenges. K commented that much NEET provision is 'dead end' with no prospect of progression. She also referred to the increased entry qualifications, such as five A to C grades at GCSE, required to apply for

apprenticeships, which excluded young people without formal qualifications. L argued that inequalities of opportunity were already evident at school, where in his view, schools had good links with employers, but the best work experience placements in Year 10 went to the most academically and socially able students.

A number of issues were raised about the role of schools in delivering careers advice. K and M questioned whether it was fair or realistic to expect schools to provide the necessary careers support, given teachers' lack of knowledge about what is available, and their different relationship with their students (for example, a young person may not 'open up' to them but might prefer to speak to an external agency). L thought that the Raising of the Participation Age had created a logistical problem for schools, as many Year 12 courses were just a repetition of work that had been completed by the students. Schools were reported to have particular difficulty in supporting many of the young people at greatest risk of becoming NEET. K estimated that at least 60% of the students following her study programme had previously been excluded or had negative experiences of school. In her opinion, schools did not do enough to identify and address the reasons for poor behaviour, which might include learning or developmental difficulties. Such students were often negatively perceived by teachers.

.

All the professionals expressed concern about the poor match for some students between their goals, skills, and destinations post-sixteen. Three suggested that schools were biased towards encouraging their students to

attend their sixth form in order to gain funding, and were therefore reluctant to allow alternative providers to advise their students. As a result some students embarked on courses which were unsuitable for them. J and L suggested that there was too much emphasis at school on passing examinations.

The apprentices in particular made the point that there was a strong pressure on academically able young people at school to pursue the university route, rather than consider alternatives such as vocational training. Those who were interested in apprenticeships for example, did not feel that they were given adequate advice and opportunities to explore what was available.

Finally, the professionals argued that providers themselves faced major changes as a result of government policies, with shake ups in resourcing and responsibilities which had fundamentally affected how they worked. They had misgivings about the impact of some of these developments, while acknowledging that ongoing change was a reality to which providers had to adapt. Examples included a training provider no longer being able to cater for its previous target group of students without qualifications, due to changes in funding and the regulations; and the replacement of a universal careers service with a much smaller one, targeted at vulnerable groups.

In summary, there was a large measure of agreement between the professionals in their analysis of the impacts of being NEET on young people, and their views about the factors which were enabling or were barriers to improving opportunities for this group. There was also a high degree of overlap

between the professionals' views and the themes emerging from the interviews with the young people.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DEDUCTIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Outline

In Chapter Two I discussed critiques of the NEET label which were evident in the literature. This chapter begins with my conclusions about the implications of using this term in a research context and in society in general (5.2). The next part of the chapter (5.3.1 to 5.3.4) summarises the findings from the inductive analyses of the interviews with the nine young people and with the four professionals, and is organised according to those main themes which appear to be most salient. For each theme, I include deductive analysis in order to relate the findings to my original research aims and questions and to some of the key issues which I outlined in my review of the literature. A concluding summary (5.3.5) compares the factors identified by the young people as helpful and unhelpful in managing their NEET situation and moving out of it, with those of the professionals.

The following section (5.4.1 to 5.4.3) evaluates the relevance of the three psychological models to this study. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the implications for improving approaches to prevent young people from becoming NEET and to engage more effectively with those who have become NEET (5.5 and 5.6).

Table 5.1 is a synthesis showing how the themes from Chapter Four map onto the analysis in Chapter Five. To facilitate the analysis, changes have been made to the structure set out in Chapter Four as follows:

- The comments made by young people about their situation when NEET and EET have been considered together to allow easier comparison.
- Where the professionals have commented about a theme, their views have been included alongside those of the young people.
- The table includes the seven main themes from Chapter Four, and subordinate themes which have been moved in order to consider comments about NEET and EET together (for example, 4.2.2(iii), 'Family and Friends' has been included under 'significant relationships'). Where subordinate themes have not been listed, it should be assumed that they are included under their original main themes.

Table 5.1: Relationship between the themes in Chapters Four and Five

Themes in Chapter Four	Themes in Chapter Five
4.3.1 Impact on personal identity 4.2.1 Learning from the NEET experience 4.4 Views of professionals	5.2.1 Perceptions of self
4.3.2 Significant relationships 4.2.2(iii) Family and friends 4.4 Views of professionals	5.2.2 Significant relationships
4.2.3 How society views 'young people' 4.4. Views of professionals	5.2.3 Youth identity in society 5.2.3(i) Being 'young' 5.2.3(ii) Being 'NEET'
4.2.2 Support and opportunities to prepare for life beyond school 4.3.3 School experience 4.2.2(i) Education and learning 4.2.2(ii) Training and work 4.2.4 Looking to the future 4.4 Views of professionals	5.2.4 Help to prepare for adulthood 5.2.4(i) School 5.2.4(ii) Post-school education training and work 5.2.4(iii) Feeling prepared for adulthood

5.2 NEET as a social construction

Section 2.3 of the literature review covered some of the robust criticisms made of the term NEET, in particular its negative connotations with individual risks, problems and deficits in those young people thus labelled. While acknowledging the problems with the label, I decided to adopt it for the purposes of this study, on the grounds that NEET status is the focus of many research and policy initiatives, which have a significant impact on the lives of young people, and is therefore worthy of attention. However, it is important to reiterate that NEET is

purely a social construction. Analysing the concept of NEET through the lens of a social constructionist approach as described by Burr (2003), it is clearly a category developed by a particular Government at a particular point in time, for a particular section of society, in response to prevailing political, economic and social conditions (rising unemployment amongst the young due to factors such as reductions in unskilled work, globalisation, recession and technological change – these of course also being social constructions).

While the motives for defining a particular group of young people in this way may have been well-intentioned, the label has increasingly been perceived as a ‘problem category’ which shifts the focus away from structural and social inequalities, onto perceived deficits within individuals. In Burr’s (2003) terms, this social knowledge is sustained by social processes and actions. Thus, it becomes a received wisdom that young people who are NEET are a problem, and have problems, and therefore require firm and even punitive measures to rectify these. A parallel construct is to view them as ‘vulnerable victims’ in need of support.

The literature identifies that the population of young people who are NEET is heterogeneous, with diverse circumstances and a wide range of needs, and for some young people, NEET status is not necessarily problematic. My group of young people was also diverse in terms of their circumstances, but differed from the wider population as they perceived that being NEET had definitely been problematic for them personally. My study underscores the importance of exploring individual experiences and avoiding assumptions about the supposed

characteristics of young people who are NEET, as argued by Yates and Payne (2006).

Much of the literature suggests that disadvantaged young people face greater difficulties than their advantaged peers in making a smooth transition to adult life in industrialised societies (Bynner, 2012). According to Barnes (2005), 'disadvantage' has no universally accepted definition, but is associated with complex factors including economic deprivation, being in challenging home circumstances, being in care, being a young parent or a young carer, having a disability and having poor basic skills. Although being NEET is in itself recognised as being a 'disadvantage', on the basis of these other criteria, most of the young people in my study did not seem to fall into the most disadvantaged group. Nevertheless they faced a range of difficult circumstances, and their experiences reflected some of the complexities, uncertainties and lack of a sense of 'preparedness' in navigating this phase of their lives. There was frequently a sense of 'randomness' and lack of direction about the paths young people took, as they themselves recognised.

5.3.1 Perceptions of self

My first and second research questions were concerned with exploring the young people's perceptions of their NEET experiences compared with their current experiences now that they were in EET. In the interview I therefore asked young people to reflect on how they felt about being NEET and how that

time of their life had changed them. As these two themes are closely linked, I review them together.

The interviews revealed that being NEET had impacted in numerous ways on these young people's personal identity and outlook on life. They described a mixture of positive and negative perceptions of themselves, but their feelings were predominantly negative. Insecurity, lack of confidence and feeling low and trapped by their circumstances were common experiences, although two interviewees retained a sense of optimism that things would improve. Young people used a range of coping strategies during this time, but they often found it hard to deal with the mismatch between their situation and their previous expectations, and with the boredom, isolation, lack of money, and rejection they experienced. Most saw themselves as partly responsible for their circumstances and many expressed regret looking back on the choices they had made. Many young people described a 'turning point' within themselves when they were galvanised into trying to make changes in their situation.

The themes these young people reported are reflected in the literature, where several ethnographic and narrative studies have focused on how young people 'tell their stories', the attributions they make about their circumstances and the sense they make of what has happened to them. The lifespan perspective and in particular the concept of 'transition' seem particularly applicable to such studies. For example, Holland and Thomson (2009) in a longitudinal qualitative study of young people's transitions to adulthood, explored how their accounts included ideas of epiphanies, turning points and critical biographical moments.

Holland and Thomson (2009, p. 464) cautioned against making assumptions that there is a direct relationship between 'evidence of the life as told and interpretations of the life as lived', though they accepted that they have some congruence. Whilst acknowledging this valid point, it is noteworthy that the themes from my study are widespread in the literature, suggesting that many young people tend to interpret their experiences in these ways.

When asked how they felt now that they were in EET, the interviewees unanimously expressed more positive feelings about themselves in the present than when they were NEET. However, their feelings about their current situation were mixed and many evidently did not feel fully settled in their lives.

Despite their mixed feelings and ongoing uncertainty about their future life trajectory, the overall resilience of these young people was striking. They expressed predominantly positive feelings about their situation 'now' such as optimism, motivation, hope, and pride in what they had achieved. Lumby (2012) points out that although there is a prevailing narrative in the literature, of youth as being 'at risk' there is also a counter-narrative of youth as often agentic, creative and buoyant.

Although the young people did not regard their period of NEET in a positive light, nearly all of them said they had learned something from the experience, referring to how it had broadened their outlook, helped them to gain positive personal qualities and made them very determined not to allow it to happen again. This difficult experience seemed to have helped their personal growth,

but this was perceived in hindsight. Had these young people still been NEET, their perspectives would probably have been much more negative.

The professionals agreed that being NEET was generally more of a negative than a positive experience for young people. They described the adverse impact of being NEET on young people's motivation, optimism and self-esteem and suggested that for some young people with pre-existing depression and anxiety, being NEET further exacerbated their mental health.

It would be unrealistic in view of the wider literature to exclude any consideration of 'risk factors' in the accounts of the young people I interviewed, although I regarded it as important to balance this with an account of relevant 'resilience factors' as advocated by Schoon and Bynner (2003) and others. In line with the research on risk factors associated with being or becoming NEET (for example, Arnold and Baker, 2012; Bynner, 2012), most of the young people I interviewed had experienced similar kinds of adversity in their lives. In many cases they considered that their difficulties were directly linked to subsequently becoming NEET. Some young people were continuing to face significant adversity, but expressed more positive feelings about managing these problems now that they were in education or employment.

There was also evidence in the young people's accounts that they benefited from some of the key resilience or protective factors which have been identified through research (Bynner, 2012). Some seemed to possess positive personal qualities such as self belief and optimism; some evidently received warmth,

cohesion and emotional support from their families; and some had benefited from environmental protective factors outside the family, such as positive relationships with a caring adult at school or post-sixteen.

SDT also adopts a positive view of people's capacity for resilience. Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 68) argue 'that most people show considerable effort, agency, and commitment in their lives appears, in fact, to be more normative than exceptional.' The three universal conditions that people need in order to develop and thrive – competence, relatedness and autonomy, appear to be closely linked to the concept of resilience. These core concepts have particular resonance in the context of this study. The themes concerning the impact of being NEET on young people's personal identity, how they viewed themselves and thought others viewed them, their perceptions of the support and opportunities available to prepare for adult life, and their thoughts about the future, can be conceptualised in terms of competence (the need to feel confident and effective in one's actions) and autonomy (the need to behave in a manner congruent with one's values and interests), while the impact of significant relationships has obvious links with the concept of relatedness.

.

5.3.2 Significant relationships

My third and fourth research questions focused on the young people's views about factors which had helped or hindered them, in the present and when they were NEET. In the interview they were asked about what had helped or not helped, and how they thought that other people perceived them.

A dominant theme in the young people's accounts was the powerful influence on their emotions and behaviour (both positive and negative) of 'significant others' including family, friends and adults outside the family. This was the case both while they were NEET and now they were in EET. I prompted the young people to think broadly about a range of 'other people' from those closest to them to others more distant, reflecting the nested ecosystems surrounding an individual in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems (1979) and bio-ecological models (2001).

Some families were perceived as supportive when their child was NEET, despite being worried and frustrated, while others reacted in ways that the young person found unhelpful, for example being very critical or rejecting. Despite these different parental responses, none of the young people experienced a complete breakdown of family relationships, and once they moved onto EET their relationships with their parents improved. However, extremely adverse family circumstances are the reality for a small percentage of young people, and there is a strong association between such difficulties and later becoming NEET (Barnardo's, 2008).

The young people's comments revealed that friends were very influential in their lives while they were NEET and since they had moved to EET. Some friends were described as influential in a positive way, for example helping with practical and emotional support, but others were perceived negatively as being poor role models or lacking understanding of the young person's work or educational commitments. In many cases, the young people reported that since

they had moved onto EET they had outgrown past friends and gained a new set of friends with more similar outlooks and circumstances to their own.

A substantial body of psychological research has explored the diverse impacts of close relationships on human development. In Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1979), family and friends are a crucial part of the 'microsystem', those groups and institutions which have the most immediate and direct impact on the development of the child and young person. As stated earlier, the

resilience research has identified features of family support which appear to be protective, such as emotional warmth.

SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2000) places a similar emphasis on the importance of 'significant others', with its concept of 'relatedness' (the universal need to experience and reciprocate love, care and acceptance). Parents play a central role in supporting the young person to develop autonomous motivation, which is associated with more positive outcomes for individuals (Joussemet, Landry and Koestner, 2008). Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2005) found that self-determination in adolescents was significantly related to the extent to which their parents encouraged them to pursue their own interests and values. The theme of being given the freedom to make their own choices, even if they made mistakes, featured strongly in some young people's accounts:

I: "so my dad's, my dad's one of those people who'd never stop me from doing something he wouldn't tell me to do something he literally says 'your choice, you, you choose your mistakes' like that."

Interviewer: Yes, yeah. And have you found that helpful?

I: “Err yeah because it makes me have to think more about what I’m doing.”

One might speculate whether this type of parental approach compared to a more controlling parental style, helped these particular individuals to develop a strong sense of personal competence and autonomy, and how this might in turn have influenced their coping strategies.

Much research on adolescence and early adulthood highlights the prominent influence of peers in young people’s lives (Cotterell, 2007). SDT has begun to explore the impact of close peer relationships on a person’s autonomous motivation. Deci and Ryan (2008a) cite studies suggesting that friendships can play an important role in developing mutual autonomy support between individuals. However, as has been identified in relation to support from parents and school staff, the influence of friends could presumably vary, according to the extent to which they are ‘autonomy supportive’ versus ‘controlling’.

In keeping with the evidence that an important protective factor is mentoring or support from an adult outside the family (Phillips, 2010; DuBois et al, 2011; Sheehy, Kumrai and Woodhead, 2011), most of the interviewees referred to a key adult outside the family who had provided them with practical and psychological support. They spoke in terms of such adults taking a genuine interest in how they were getting on, of having faith in them, giving them the push they needed and acting as a ‘bridge’ to useful information and contacts. As a result, the young people described gaining or regaining their confidence

and self-belief. These adults included school and college staff, mentors or tutors; careers and employment advisors from the local authority; mentors in voluntary organisations such as The Prince's Trust; line managers and other colleagues at work. Some young people had also received brief but supportive input from housing advisors, counsellors and GPs to help with specific practical or emotional difficulties.

All the professionals emphasised the fundamental need for young people in NEET circumstances to build relationships with supportive adults, particularly in situations where families were unable to provide this support. They saw such relationships as providing a 'secure base' with the necessary emotional and practical support for young people to develop appropriate employability skills. However the professionals expressed concern about the impact of fundamental changes to their services, on the future quality and scope of the provision they might be able to offer.

5.3.3 Youth identity in society

I explored with the interviewees how they thought people in wider society might view their situation at the time they were NEET compared with their current situation. I was interested to know if they thought that there were stereotypes about young people in general, and about young people in different circumstances. This linked to research questions one and two about their perceptions of being NEET and EET.

5.3.3(i) Being 'young'

The young people provided rich insights into how they perceived themselves, as well as how they thought they were perceived by others. For most, being 'young' had largely positive connotations such as having fun, having lots of free time, going out with friends, being free from responsibilities, being a special time of life, having choices, having energy, and learning from experience.

Conversely, 'being young' was associated with some challenges such as needing money, being dependent on family, being treated like a child, having difficulties in finding jobs, making poor decisions, being inexperienced, and feeling as if they had extra to prove as an employee.

The young people perceived other people's expectations about 'typical young people/teenagers' mainly in negative terms. For example, when asked what other people would think about a young person getting an apprenticeship with the council, one apprentice replied: *'They'd probably be shocked 'cause they just think that really that we don't do anything'*. However, some thought that those in wider society would be understanding of young people; for example the uncertainty they faced in deciding what they wanted to do in life: *'I suppose some would just see me as a normal teenager who's just like, doesn't know what she wants to do'*.

Given their roles in working with young people who are NEET, it is not surprising that the professionals were inclined to focus on the vulnerabilities of

‘being young’ in the current economic climate. They associated ‘being young’ with inexperience, lack of employability skills, having unrealistic expectations and needing support.

5.3.3(ii) Being ‘NEET’

In terms of the perceived views of wider society, being a single parent, being on benefits, and being unemployed were all mentioned by the interviewees as potential negative stereotypes of young people. They seemed unaware of the NEET label, although they showed some awareness of the stigma attached to being an unemployed young person on benefits. It is interesting to speculate to what extent young people are influenced by attitudes they encounter in their own communities and in the media, as this group were much more inclined than the professionals to blame themselves for becoming NEET, while the professionals emphasised the responsibilities of wider society to provide the necessary education, options and opportunities for young people. Most of the respondents thought that they would generally be perceived in a more positive light since returning to education or obtaining an apprenticeship.

The professionals recognised that the term NEET describes a very diverse group of young people in terms of their circumstances and needs, but suggested that this wasn’t understood in wider society. In their experience, the NEET label was stigmatising due to its negative connotations, for example amongst employers. This theme was frequent in the literature, for example the

‘moral underclass’ (MUD) discourse suggested by Levitas (2005). This links back to the discussion in the previous paragraph.

Two recurring themes expressed by the young people and the professionals were the negative impact of being NEET on young people’s self confidence and sense of agency, and their dependence on encouragement, support and guidance from understanding adults to help them through this. The crucial role of supportive adults has already been highlighted in the section on ‘significant relationships’. Many young people’s accounts captured the transformative effect of adult support and being given a sense of competence and autonomy on their feelings of self-worth.

SDT offers some useful perspectives for thinking about the young people’s experiences of being NEET. It predicts that individuals will vary in their autonomous motivation depending on the extent to which their environment has fostered their feelings of individual competence, autonomy and relatedness. I suggest that being NEET is an adverse experience which would undermine the capacity for competence and autonomy of most individuals. How individuals respond to the challenges of being NEET might be influenced both by their previous levels of autonomous motivation, and also their ability to maintain perceptions of personal competence, autonomy and relatedness in their current situation.

Positive autonomy-supportive experiences, for example at home and school might enhance young people’s confidence and competence in navigating the

transition from school to adult life. Some of the young people in this study expressed views which suggested they had a greater sense of autonomous motivation than others. This raises the possibility of whether young people could be better prepared for challenges such as NEET if their sense of competence and autonomy were more effectively nurtured. With its emphasis on the systemic influences surrounding individuals, SDT offers possibilities for intervening positively to develop autonomy and competence both before, and during adverse experiences such as NEET.

5.3.4 Help to prepare for adulthood

As stated previously, research questions three and four were concerned with the young people's views about factors which had helped or hindered them, in the present and when they were NEET. In addition to the important role played by 'significant others', the young people had views about the support they had received or would like to have received from school, from education post-school, and via training and work. These are discussed in turn.

5.3.4(i) School

Perceptions of school featured as an important theme. Having difficulties at school such as behaviour problems, poor attendance, poor basic skills, and learning difficulties or disabilities, are factors that are strongly associated with later becoming NEET (Arnold and Baker, 2012). Difficulties that fitted into one or more of these categories were described by all four young people attending

the training provider, and one of the five apprentices. Overall the apprentices had left school with more qualifications than the young people at the training provider, which would be anticipated, in view of the evidence that attainment at 16 and the qualifications achieved by an individual are the most important factors in determining later participation and attainment (HM Government, 2011).

I expected that young people who had struggled academically or emotionally might not have very positive views of school, but I was surprised that so many of the academically successful students were also critical of aspects of their school experience. This latter group described their loss of motivation, and disappointment that they had not felt treated as adults or been given sufficient support to prepare for life beyond school. These difficulties seem to have emerged towards the end of their school careers.

The professionals also had criticisms of the support schools provided for those at risk of subsequently becoming NEET, such as weaknesses in addressing underlying causes of disaffection and poor behaviour, being poorly equipped to offer good quality careers advice, and failing to provide equal access to good work experience placements.

Ecological and self-determination theories both regard school as having a significant impact on young people's development. SDT explains this in terms of the extent to which the school staff and culture encourage autonomy, versus controlling pupils and students (Guay, Ratelle and Chanal, 2008). Later in the

chapter I will discuss the role of schools in helping to prevent young people from subsequently becoming NEET.

5.3.4(ii) Post-school education, training and work

The young people attending the training provider had left school with fewer qualifications overall than the apprentices, and the education courses they were following at the training centre, reflected this. They were working towards Level 1 or 2 in core subjects such as English, Mathematics and ICT (Level 1 is comparable to GCSE Grades D to G, and Level 2 to GCSE Grades A* to C). The apprentices already had Level 1 or 2 in the core subjects, so they were studying for the NVQ Level 1 and 2 in business and administration (these are vocational qualifications equivalent to Level 1 and 2).

Despite the differences in educational attainment between the young people at the training centre and those on apprenticeships, they expressed similar views about the value of education. To some extent this was due to a pragmatic recognition that not having qualifications limited the job options available, but a few also commented that they were enjoying learning more than they had at school. They attributed this to the more relaxed environment, informal curriculum and more approachable staff at the training provider or work-based learning, than had been the case at school. Some young people also commented that their perceptions about education had become more positive as they had matured.

Turning to the help which the apprentices received at work, they were appreciative of the support they received from colleagues and their line managers. However they also described feeling extra responsibility and pressure to do well because of their youth and inexperience.

SDT emphasises the benefits to employees and employers of providing autonomy-supportive work environments (Deci and Ryan, 2008a) and arguably this is even more important for young people who are embarking on their working lives. There is little research on the impact of adult support on young people in the workplace, but some studies suggest that a key factor is the quality of the working relationship between adults and young employees. Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer (2006) argue that the relationship with work supervisors is a central component of the adolescent work experience, but the effects on young people could be positive or negative, depending on whether the relationship is autonomy-supportive or controlling. McDonald et al (2007) explored the role of informal mentoring (defined as developing an important relationship with a non-parental adult) in the transition to full time employment among young adults aged twenty-three to twenty-eight in the USA. Their study identified that receiving informal mentoring was positively related to the likelihood of full time employment.

The professionals described local and national provision to help young people access education, training and work post-school as a fragmented and confusing patchwork of initiatives, with many different providers, and lots of gaps. They commented that keeping abreast of constant changes to the provision was

challenging even for the providers, let alone young people, who did not know where to access help and received insufficient information about the options available. The NFER research by Spielhofer et al (2009a) also emphasised that young people need better information, advice and guidance about the options available to them after leaving school. It is therefore concerning that some research suggests that the range and quality of careers support available to young people has substantially reduced with the recent changes in Government policy (Roberts, 2013; Langley, Hooley and Bertuchi, 2014).

5.3.4(iii) Feeling prepared for adulthood

At the end of their interviews I explored with the young people where they saw themselves in the future and what might help or hinder them from fulfilling their plans. These topics primarily relate to research questions three and four.

The young people's comments suggested that they regarded themselves as making an important life transition to adulthood and they expressed a range of views about how prepared they felt for this. Some young people explicitly stated that the experience of being NEET had had the positive outcome of making them 'grow up' and develop maturity sooner than their peers. Attributes associated by the young people with adulthood were: developing appropriate personal attitudes such as motivation, a sense of purpose and maturity; managing money; encountering and getting on with a wider variety of people; taking responsibility for the role of employee, managing their time, planning ahead; and generally thinking more carefully about the consequences of their

actions. For D, being a parent brought particular responsibilities to provide for her child. Nevertheless some young people expressed ambivalence about becoming adults and described feeling ill prepared in certain respects for adult life. They wanted adults in general and schools in particular, to do more to prepare them for adult life, although in one or two cases they recognised that they had not necessarily been very receptive to any messages or support offered.

The professionals commented that a lot of young people had unrealistic expectations about life after school and were unprepared for the challenges they would face in finding suitable work, training or education courses. They observed that for some students, there was a poor match between their goals and skills and their destinations post-sixteen, and laid some of the responsibility for this on schools.

The extensive literature on the transition process from school to life beyond school suggests that it is often characterised by complexity and uncertainty. Studies within the self-determination research have shown that autonomy supportive approaches on the part of parents and teachers can facilitate better transitions at earlier phases of education (Grolnick et al, 2000), and it seems feasible that similar approaches could be developed to prepare and support young people prior to leaving school.

5.3.5 Summary of supportive factors and barriers

The factors that helped young people to cope with their situation and/or to move out of being NEET, and those which hindered them, are summarised in table 5.2, along with the views of the professionals. The young people cited factors in relation to their personal situation, while the professionals took a more systemic view and included factors which they felt were influential in the support offered by the systems surrounding the young person.

Table 5.2: Supportive factors and barriers in the accounts of the young people and the professionals

	Supportive factors	Barriers
Young people	Sense of personal efficacy Confidence Optimism and hope Goals and drive to do better Positive view of own ability Perceived opportunities Difficult experiences as growth points Desire not to return to the past Supportive family/friends/other adults Importance of other people believing in the young person Value placed on education/learning Desire to work Value placed on earnings Value placed on a career Being 'given a chance' Future orientated	Making the wrong choices Not taking the help offered Stress Feeling fed up Boredom Worry/anxiety Sadness/feeling low Disappointment Anger Frustration Gloominess Pessimism Loneliness Isolation Depression Confusion Embarrassment Nervousness Regret about what 'might have been' Insecurity Unsupportive family/friends Lack of help and advice at school
Professionals	Supportive adult Practical support Support to develop employability skills	Low self-esteem Difficulties with family relationships Problems with family finances

	Supportive family Supportive employers	Mental health needs Learning difficulties Poor experiences of school Negative attitudes towards 'NEET' in wider society Unrealistic expectations held by young people Poor advice and support in schools Poor match between skills and the courses young people are on Poor tracking and data sharing post-school Fragmented and confusing provision Insufficient help and advice for young people Pressures on providers
--	---	---

5.4.1 Relevance of the lifespan perspective to the current study

Having considered my findings in the context of the three psychological models I described in the literature review, I now move on to draw conclusions about their applicability and usefulness to this study.

The model of 'emerging adulthood' has limited applicability to this research, for as argued in the literature review it favours 'within-person' explanations of being NEET, which place too little responsibility on structural factors and too much on individual agency. The focus of this study by definition is on young people who have not to date experienced an orderly progression towards adult life, as they have experienced a period of being NEET. The validity of the concept of transition is a matter of some debate, however, I share the view of Shildrick and McDonald (2009) that transition is a 'necessary heuristic' to understand the young person's life journey, even if that journey is not linear or tidy. My findings

suggest that 'making a transition to becoming an adult' was a meaningful concept for the young people I interviewed and they regarded leaving school as an important turning point in their life trajectory.

5.4.2 Relevance of ecological models to the current study

The frameworks and concepts offered by ecological models are particularly relevant to this study in three important respects. First, the young people conveyed a strong sense of being active agents in their lives rather than passive observers. This fits well with the emphasis in Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (2001), on the active role an individual plays in her or his development through engaging with other people, objects and symbols within her or his environment.

Second, my interviews with the four adults who are locally involved in various capacities with supporting young people post-sixteen, endorsed the value of applying an ecological model to analyse local provision. They provided a rich picture of factors locally at the individual, family, school and post-school provision which helped or hindered young people in preparing them for adulthood. Their views highlighted the need for all the agencies and players who work with young people in a locality to have clear frameworks and coordination to support their progress. In this context, the multi-level ecological framework developed by Hodgson and Spours (2013) offers some useful principles to consider.

Third, my findings reflected some of the resilience and risk factors that seemed to be operating for these young people, in comparison with the picture presented in the literature. The analysis has confirmed that adverse life experiences had a substantial impact on the perceptions of many of the young people in this study, but has also identified that some of them benefited from certain 'resilience' factors such as belief in themselves and supportive family or other relationships.

5.4.3 Relevance of SDT to the current study

I am not aware of any studies where SDT has been specifically applied to the situation and perceptions of young people who are NEET. However having considered aspects of three psychological models, in my view SDT offers the most potential for understanding this life experience and developing practical tools to support young people who face it. The strength of self-determination theory is that it offers explanations in relation to three aspects of the young people's experiences: competence, autonomy and relatedness.

The young people's accounts have highlighted the importance of personal motivation and if/how individuals retain this at times of difficulty, for example via support from parents, teachers and other adults. A further strength of SDT is that it is not a 'within-person' model, as it moves the focus away from the individual to consider the family, educational and work context which can support autonomous motivation, and how this might be achieved. In this respect it has much in common with ecological theories. This type of

interactionist approach is familiar to educational psychologists, and one with which they generally feel comfortable.

The studies outlined in the domains of parenting, education and work underline the importance of appropriate support to develop young people's autonomous motivation. They suggest that if adults are too controlling and don't encourage young people to make choices, this risks undermining their sense of autonomy and competence, which in turn may affect their learning, performance and psychological well-being.

In the next section I attempt to draw together the findings from this study, the literature, and SDT, to consider the practical implications for schools and other agencies in working to prevent young people from becoming NEET and to support them if they do face this experience.

5.5 Preventative approaches – the role of schools

A number of studies in the literature review, particularly those conducted by NFER explored the potential role of schools in identifying young people at risk of later becoming NEET, and developing approaches to engage them and improve outcomes for them, as advocated by the Department for Education (2013). Many of the young people I interviewed had experienced some of the relevant 'risk factors' during their time at school, and one might speculate whether they might have avoided becoming NEET had these been addressed earlier or differently.

The first question concerns identification: how might schools ascertain who is at risk of NEET in the future? This would undoubtedly be a very complex issue to address, given the diverse and changing nature of the NEET population, and bearing in mind Spielhofer et al's (2009a) argument that young people fall into different 'categories of NEET' which require different interventions. It is also likely that factors such as the levels of poverty and disadvantage in a locality would influence the risks for a specific school population. However, as discussed in the literature review, work is already underway to develop suitable screening tools for schools to use (Southcott et al, 2013). I argued that two important issues must be resolved before introducing bespoke screening tools: the first being the ethical questions linked to such screening, and the second, the ethical imperative of putting in place appropriate interventions, which would largely be the responsibility of schools in the current context.

The literature review identified a raft of needs and difficulties which are known to have a strong association with the likelihood of later becoming NEET, and it is of course the case that schools already have informal and formal means at their disposal for identifying, tracking and addressing many such needs. For example, young people with learning and/or behaviour difficulties at school are at greater risk of later becoming NEET, and schools should identify and address these needs early in order to improve the educational experience for such young people.

Disaffection is another strong indicator to suggest that the school environment might not be satisfying some young people's needs and aspirations. I argue that

there is likely to be a considerable overlap between young people who are disaffected at school and those who later drop out and/or become NEET, and therefore efforts to address disaffection might not only improve young people's experience of school, but might help to prevent them becoming NEET later on.

The second important element is intervention. The evidence suggests that the majority of young people who are NEET do *not* face multiple or complex barriers to engagement, and young people could be prevented from becoming NEET if they are targeted with the right support early on (Spielhofer et al, 2009a; Audit Commission, 2010). Spielhofer et al's (2009a) study of NEET young people suggested that two-fifths faced personal and structural barriers and were likely to remain NEET in the medium-term ('sustained NEET'), but the remaining three-fifths did not face such barriers. I will discuss what 'the right support' might look like, after considering whether Spielhofer et al's (2009a) groupings seem applicable to the young people in my study.

Most of the young people I interviewed had experienced some barriers to engagement. While not wishing to underestimate their impact, I do not consider that they could be described as the 'multiple and complex' barriers faced by the two-fifths in Spielhofer et al's (2009a) 'sustained NEET' group. I would therefore place my interviewees in the 'three-fifths' group, which according to Spielhofer et al (2009a) might be less likely to become NEET if they are targeted appropriately at school. Within these, the apprentices resembled the fifth of the NEET population described by Spielhofer et al (2009a) as 'undecided NEET', as they did not face significant barriers to participating in education or training, but

had been dissatisfied with the available opportunities presented to them at school.

As I argued earlier, there are likely to be overlaps between young people who are disaffected at school and those who later become NEET. This suggests that similar interventions may be appropriate (at least for a proportion of students at risk of NEET). Three studies offer useful insights into the potential for harnessing SDT as a tool to develop interventions. The study by Vallerand, Fortier and Guay (1997) explores the mechanisms leading to young people dropping out of college, the paper by Wilding (2015) considers interventions for disaffected students, and Niemiec and Ryan (2009) suggest strategies to enhance student autonomy and competence.

Vallerand, Fortier and Guay (1997) hypothesised that school and home environments which were not sufficiently autonomy-supportive, undermined the perceived personal autonomy and competence of some students, which over time to them having reduced self-determined motivation, making the decision to drop out and ultimately, acting on this decision. A key implication is that more could be done in schools to develop autonomy-supportive environments for all students.

Wilding (2015) discusses the potential for applying SDT in schools to support students who are disaffected. She argues that there is a relationship between young people's perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and experiences of disaffection. Wilding (2015) suggests that viewing disaffection

through the lens of SDT, offers promising opportunities for EPs to facilitate change at an organisational level in order to re-engage disaffected students. A particular strength of the paper is that it outlines specific ideas for EP interventions, based on using person-centred thinking (PCT) and consultation. A paper by Sanderson (2000) defines PCT as:

‘...a process of continual listening, and learning; focussed on what is important to someone now, and for the future; and acting upon this in alliance with their family and friends.’ (p 11)

Sanderson (2000) provides a useful outline of some key features and approaches employed in PCT.

Wilding (2015) suggests using PCT to support students’ autonomy by giving them control and ownership of their choices; their competence by identifying personal strengths and skills; and their relatedness by showing respect for, and acting on their views and suggestions. She promotes consultation as an effective tool to establish collaborative relationships with teaching staff and a way to engage them in bringing about change in school systems for the benefit of disaffected students.

Niemiec and Ryan (2009) recommend that schools employ a wide range of strategies in order to enhance student autonomy and competence. Strategies to enhance autonomy include providing choice and explaining the purpose of learning activities, acknowledging students’ feelings about what they are learning, and reducing pressure and control to a minimum. Strategies for

enhancing competence include giving feedback about individual effort and progress rather than using standardised tests to make comparisons, and providing tasks with the optimum level of challenge. Strategies for enhancing relatedness include conveying warmth, caring, and respect to students.

In many respects, the list of recommended strategies from a self-determination perspective could be regarded as 'best educational practice' for all young people, and good schools arguably adopt similar approaches towards all students as part of their whole-school ethos. In my view this congruence can be regarded as a strength, because the approaches are more likely to have good 'face-validity' in schools and might therefore be more likely to be put into practice.

The available evidence from the NFER studies in particular about developing suitable interventions can be summarised as follows:

- Young people who become NEET do so for disparate reasons and therefore preventative interventions need to be differentiated to take account of different needs.
- Local variations mean that the population of young people in schools and communities can have quite different characteristics, even within a small geographical area. Schools must therefore develop a good understanding of the unique characteristics of their own school population in order to develop appropriate 'bespoke' interventions.

- Studies of interventions with young people who are already NEET suggest that successful approaches tend to offer more flexible, informal, personalised and practical experiences than are traditionally associated with schools. Another important factor identified is having staff with the right qualities and skills to be open and supportive with young people who may bring challenging and complex needs.

The first two points underscore the need for schools to develop a sound knowledge and understanding of their local school population with the *future* destination of their students in mind. Arguably this will require something of a shift of emphasis towards the potential pathways of students after school, as well as their current academic attainment. The third point presents schools with some challenges. The flexibility and informality advocated for such interventions may be difficult to achieve in a school setting, and it could also be difficult to persuade young people who are becoming disaffected with the curriculum and the staff they have experienced to date, that a genuinely different approach is being offered. A point made by some of the professionals I interviewed, was that school staff might not feel equipped to deliver such programmes and might also find it difficult to develop a different relationship and approach with students. However, the NFER research underway by Kettlewell et al (2014) and Stevens et al (2014) looking at nine such school-based programmes, should help to identify which factors contribute to their effectiveness. Disseminating these findings to schools might better inform their thinking and planning.

5.6 Supportive approaches once young people become NEET

The literature review, and in a small way my difficulties with recruiting young people to take part in this study, emphasised that it is much harder to engage with young people once they become NEET. In my view, the more generous funding in the past for non-school based agencies such as youth work made it easier than it is currently to provide alternative initiatives to re-engage young people. For example the 'Neighbourhood Support Fund' between 1999 and 2003, channelled Government funding through 650 voluntary and community sector projects at neighbourhood level in forty of the most deprived areas of England. It drew on local knowledge and project workers' experience of, and commitment to, providing informal support to young people in their local community. This approach facilitated the development of provision that was responsive to the needs of young people, the challenges they faced, and the social, economic and cultural context of individual neighbourhoods, and was achieved at a relatively small cost (Golden et al, 2004). The successful features of this initiative were identified as: using non-statutory providers who were already embedded in their local communities and successful in engaging young people in their locality; having project workers with the appropriate commitment and skills to work with such young people; and offering provision that was appealing to young people, flexible and responsive.

The importance of tailoring programmes to the needs of young people, and of having staff with the right skills to engage with them are consistent themes from the research (Spielhofer et al, 2009a; Kettlewell et al, 2014; Stevens et al,

2014). The argument that support will be more effective if it is tailored to local needs is also very pertinent (Hodgson and Spours, 2013). The views of the professionals in my study indicate that the validity of these themes is already well understood. Although such recommendations may be more difficult to implement in the current climate, the professionals showed ongoing commitment to supporting young people and a willingness to adapt their provision to changing demands. One example of this was the outreach approach being piloted locally by the Specialist Careers Service to target those most in need of support, through interventions such as mentoring.

Some researchers in the field of SDT have suggested that the rapidly changing nature of modern society and work requires greater flexibility, adaptability and resilience from individuals if they are to navigate changes and upheavals successfully (Flum and Blustein, 2000; La Guardia, 2009). They argue that fostering optimal autonomous motivation is an important means of equipping individuals for such challenges. In my study, the young people and the professionals alike expressed the view that there was insufficient support to prepare young people for the realities of adult life. In many cases this resulted in young people having unrealistic expectations about the ease with which they would navigate life after school. Such preparation could be provided in school and in settings post-school and could usefully include approaches similar to those advocated by Wilding (2015) in addition to practical support (careers advice, managing money and so on). It might also be helpful to raise awareness in young people about dealing with periods of NEET, which might help to

normalise a situation which is a reality for large numbers of young people at some stage in their life course.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Overview

The main aim of this study was to explore young people's perceptions of the time when they were NEET, compared with their perceptions since they had moved on from this situation. I hoped that obtaining their accounts first-hand, together with the views of relevant professionals, would contribute to local knowledge about potential factors that help or hinder young people who find themselves in the position of being NEET, and in turn might inform the support offered.

A further aim was to explore implications for the role of EPs (if any) in working with young people at risk of becoming NEET or who are NEET, in the context of the extension of EP involvement to young people up to the age of twenty-five, and the expectation that young people will increasingly engage directly with services to plan for their needs (Atkinson et al, 2015).

This final chapter considers the extent to which I have been successful in achieving these aims and in answering my research questions. The first part of the chapter (6.2 and 6.3) summarises my findings and conclusions. I then consider the implications of the study for organisations working with young people, such as schools, colleges, training providers and the specialist careers

service (6.4). This is followed by a discussion of the potential contribution of EPs (6.5). Section 6.6 summarises some recommendations arising from the study, while 6.7 discusses its limitations. Finally, in 6.8, I make some suggestions for future research.

6.2 Summary and conclusions in relation to research questions

In Chapter Five I argued that the term 'NEET' is a social construction with many problematic connotations. There is a strong tendency to narrowly define young people who find themselves in NEET circumstances by this label, rather than viewing their situation as a common experience during the transition to adulthood. Many studies use the label as their starting point to look for statistical relationships with different types of adversity, and Government policies show a strong bias towards 'within-person' explanations of NEET. There is little rigorous research to evaluate the effectiveness of policies designed to address these issues, with the exception of the NFER work.

Such studies provide some important insights into the factors associated with NEET status, but rarely attempt to provide a flavour of the experiences of the individuals thus affected. A few mainly ethnographic studies do place the first-hand accounts of young people at the centre of their work, but frequently they are brief edited extracts, or summaries of circumstances used to illustrate a particular point. Furthermore, the participants in studies are overwhelmingly in NEET status currently, and the ethnographic studies in particular, appear to

focus on those young people at the most disadvantaged end of the NEET spectrum.

This study endeavoured to explore young people's accounts in some depth and to shift the focus onto the positive factors that enable them to cope with being NEET and to move on from this experience, while not ignoring risk factors.

Unlike most of the existing research, this study was retrospective, asking young people to look back on their experiences of being NEET. As described, this probably influenced the ways in which young people interpreted their experiences, compared with interviewing young people currently in NEET circumstances. The young people I interviewed did not seem to fall into the most disadvantaged group, but into Spielhofer et al's 'three-fifths' group (2009a).

The research questions I developed were broad and open-ended in scope, with the intention of exploring general themes which might form the basis for future research, rather than answering very specific questions. My analysis identified four main themes linked to my five research questions.

My first and second research questions asked what perceptions young people had about their past experience of being NEET, compared with their current situation of being EET. Their accounts indicated that the experience of being NEET had been a significant one in their lives, impacting on them in multiple respects, some effects of which were still being felt. Although this research was not designed to study a representative sample, the diversity of circumstances,

experiences and perceptions even within this small group of young people, reflected the heterogeneity of the wider NEET population.

The first main theme I identified was that being NEET had markedly influenced their **perceptions of themselves**, inducing predominantly negative feelings, challenging their coping strategies and leading to them struggling to make sense of what had happened to them. The few, primarily ethnographic studies which investigate individual perspectives, reinforce the view that being NEET is a very unpleasant experience for most young people, associated with feeling low, boredom, isolation, rejection and loss of motivation (Thompson, Russell and Simmons, 2014).

Using SDT as a lens to analyse young people's experiences, being NEET could be regarded as being particularly 'autonomy-undermining' due to the mismatch between the young person's values and interests with the present reality; 'competence-undermining' due to the manner in which it damages the young person's confidence and feelings of agency and control; and 'relatedness-undermining' due to the stress it induces in family relationships, the social isolation arising from having no workplace or educational establishment to go to, and having limited or no income.

Now that they had returned to EET, most of the young people conveyed a sense of resilience and optimism. The extent of these buoyant and positive attitudes was remarkable, given that so many interviewees had experienced considerable adversity in their lives in addition to being NEET. Moving out of

NEET had perhaps enabled them to reframe this as an experience they had learned from. However it seems likely that being NEET long-term might be damaging in general for the self-confidence and motivation of young people.

From a social constructionist perspective, although these young people were not aware of the 'NEET' label, they are growing up in a society with powerful expectations and norms that 'becoming an adult' involves certain things such as having a job, earning money and so on. It is therefore not surprising that they found it difficult to manage the 'disconnect' between their expectations and the experience of being NEET. Nevertheless the young people did not present themselves as victims but expressed some personal responsibility for their past and future choices. The professionals in comparison were much more critical of the wider systems issues, such as the limited opportunities for young people.

Research questions three and four explored the views of the young people about what had helped or hindered them when they were NEET and since they had moved onto EET. A linked research question (five) ascertained the views of the professionals about helpful or hindering factors for young people.

The second main theme identified was the importance of **significant others** in the young people's lives. On balance they viewed the majority of the support from their families as positive, although being NEET caused additional tensions and in some cases, temporary breakdown of relationships. Friendships were seen as helpful in some cases but not in others. The beneficial impact of

receiving emotional and practical support from adults within and outside the family was very clear.

The third main theme was **youth identity in society**. This related to my first two research questions and investigated young people's views about their collective identity and how they thought others perceived them. Their perceptions about 'young people' in general, suggested that overall they saw being young in a positive light, but they thought that they were viewed by wider society in mainly critical terms, particularly if they were on benefits, unemployed, and/or single parents.

The fourth and final theme was **help to prepare for adulthood**, which related to research questions three and four. Many of the young people expressed frustration about difficulties with learning, poor relationships with teachers and inadequate preparation for adult life provided at school. Conversely the young people were appreciative overall of the support provided since leaving school. The latter finding might be explained partly by changes in their attitude to education, as a result of growing maturity and having the freedom to choose what course to follow, but also the greater flexibility, personalisation and informality of learning available in post-school settings.

In summary, I consider that my study provided some general answers to the research questions I posed. I was able to identify some of the perceptions these young people had about being EET and how this compared with being NEET, thus addressing research questions one and two. Table 5.2 in the previous

chapter maps out numerous factors mentioned by the young people and by the professionals, as helping or hindering young people to manage or move out of NEET, which addresses questions three, four and five. The limitations of the study will be discussed in 6.6.

6.3 Contribution to knowledge

In Chapter Three it was emphasised that the study was designed from an interpretivist perspective. I was therefore clear from the outset that it would not be justifiable to make generalisations about my findings to the wider population of young people who are NEET, as would have been argued from a positivist perspective. However I believe it would be fair to say tentatively that the themes and implications I identify from this small piece of work are echoed more widely, and may be of interest to other Educational Psychology Services and agencies working with young people who are at risk of NEET or who are NEET.

The findings from this local study endorse the view that the NEET label is essentially a social construction with a few potentially helpful features but many problematic features. It may benefit young people if it raises society's awareness of their needs as they move on from school, and if it leads to additional resources being devoted to meeting such needs. However, it is problematic if it leads to 'pigeon-holing' and making assumptions about the supposed deficits of young people, thereby distorting attitudes and provision. In my discussions with young people and professionals, I identified three salient points. The first is that these young people demonstrated many positive inner

resources which helped them to manage the experience of being NEET.

Secondly, the young people depended on support from 'significant others' and it was notable that adults outside the family played a key role. Thirdly, the young people talked about feeling unprepared for the realities of life after school and expressed the need for more support in this regard.

6.4 Implications for the role of schools and other agencies post-sixteen

The literature amply demonstrates that the causes of young people becoming NEET are complex. Finlay et al (2010) argue that solutions cannot solely lie with education, due to the range of other circumstances contributing to what they term 'problematic' NEET status. However, applying the principle that 'prevention is better than cure', there is the potential for doing more within educational settings to benefit young people at risk of NEET. As discussed in Chapter Five, SDT offers concrete suggestions for employing different approaches which might not only reduce the likelihood of young people becoming NEET, but might also be universally beneficial to the personal development of young people.

A fundamental question raised by this study is how educational providers can engage effectively with those young people who feel disengaged from the education system and/or dissatisfied with the options on offer. This presents particular challenges for schools as discussed earlier. My interviewees (young people and professionals) described schools as falling short in terms of help with learning, poor relationships with teachers and offering inadequate preparation for adult life. School arguably has the added 'disadvantage' of being

compulsory, which probably influences how this phase of education is perceived by some young people. However there is scope for schools to work in ways which enhance autonomous motivation in their students, as shown in the self-determination and NFER research. The person-centred approaches which are already familiar to those offering services post-sixteen, could perhaps be employed more widely in schools.

Similar themes were evident in the literature. Many young people in the Spielhofer et al study (2009a) also felt negative about the teaching and learning and poor relationships with teachers at school, but unlike my interviewees, they were not on the whole particularly satisfied either, with the support available after leaving school. The negative attitude of the Spielhofer et al (2009a) interviewees towards the support after leaving school might perhaps be anticipated, since their situation was less favourable than the young people in my study i.e. they were NEET or in jobs without training.

Several NFER studies have concluded that schools and post-sixteen settings are more likely to be successful in engaging those at risk of NEET and those who become NEET, if they employ non-formal and flexible approaches to learning and have staff with the appropriate skills. The views of the young people and the professionals in my study provided some endorsement for these points. Many of the young people were evidently glad to have a chance to re-engage with education after difficult school experiences.

6.5 Implications for the role of EPs

In Chapter One I suggested that once EPs are equipped with the necessary training to work with young adults, there is potential for them to develop effective work with post-sixteen agencies in England. The Scottish experience demonstrates that EPs enhance the work carried out by such agencies through the skills they bring, such as psychological and person-centred approaches, commitment to inclusion, familiarity with transition issues and ability to conduct research and evaluate outcomes. However, the fundamental problem is that young people in NEET circumstances are by definition not in any employment, training or work setting, and therefore present a particular challenge in terms of outreach and engagement. Forging links with voluntary agencies such as Barnardo's and with careers services where they exist, may offer the best prospects for EPs to develop such work in the future.

My impression is that SDT is not a widely known model in educational psychology, and it may be a useful addition to the approaches used by EPs because of its interactionist ethos and practical applications. In schools, there is scope for EPs to apply SDT principles systemically to support students, using person-centred thinking and consultation as described by Wilding (2015). SDT thinking may potentially be of benefit to all students, but particularly those whose needs, schools struggle to meet.

6.6 Recommendations

Based on the points made previously in this chapter, schools and agencies that support young people post-sixteen might consider the following issues:

- How might schools and post-sixteen agencies in a local area work more closely together, for example in the ways suggested by Hodgson and Spours (2013) to develop more integrated and effective provision for young people?
- Schools might review their careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), giving attention to questions such as: in the context of increasing complexity of education, training and employment, are students made aware of the full range of options available and does the programme of visits/ talks reflect this; what support do staff who are responsible for CEIAG need to deliver this effectively; what helpful links are made with outside agencies; how are students prepared in general for the realities of life after they leave school.
- What if any tailored alternative programmes in terms of flexible curriculum and skilled staff are offered by schools and post-sixteen agencies to those at risk of disaffection and potentially NEET?
- What personalised support are schools and post-sixteen agencies able to offer young people, for example mentoring?
- What is the capacity to be responsive to individual needs (for example, ensuring that difficulties with learning are addressed). To what extent are students actively involved in planning their programme and encouraged

to express their views about their needs, and are these listened to and acted upon? Schools and post-sixteen agencies might be interested in exploring the principles of SDT and ways of enhancing the autonomy, competence and relatedness of young people.

- Consider how the relationship with parents might be developed to raise awareness of and obtain support for any of the issues above.

In terms of immediate dissemination, I initially intend to share the findings with those who took part; and following this, to local services with a responsibility to support young people who are NEET; and within our EPS. Although many of the young people I interviewed are likely to have moved on, I will ask the training provider and the department where the apprentices were employed, to identify if they can be contacted and if they would like to receive an information sheet summarising the findings. I also intend to provide individual feedback to the four professionals who participated; and it may also be possible to disseminate the findings more widely to agencies with a role in planning services for young people in the area, such as the Specialist Careers Service, the youth service, FE colleges and organisations from the voluntary sector.

6.7 Limitations of the study:

Willig's (2008a) concept of reflexivity provides a useful framework to consider the limitations of this study. She points out that a fundamental feature of qualitative research is to acknowledge as critically, honestly and openly as possible, the ways in which the researcher influences and shapes the research

process. Willig (2008a) describes two forms of reflexivity: **personal**, which involves considering how biases arising from our values, beliefs and life experiences have shaped the research and our responses to it; and **epistemological**, which involves reflecting upon how our view of knowledge has influenced the manner in which the study has been constructed, from the framing of the research question, through to the design and execution of the study and finally, the analysis of the findings.

In Chapter One I described how my professional and personal interests influenced my choice of research topic, and I have continued to be aware of the impact of my personal biases throughout the study, a few of which I mention here. In the literature review I opted to explore psychological aspects of NEET, but different understandings of NEET might have emerged from giving greater consideration to political and economic themes. My choice of literature is also skewed towards studies which critique the concept of NEET, as I am critical of this label.

As an EP, and a parent of young people at a similar stage in life to those in this study, I had a strong interest in and empathy for the experiences of my interviewees. While this may have been a strength in rapport-building, it may also have led to my being prone to volunteering too many of my own ideas and thus influencing the young people's comments, rather than using non-committal replies to encourage them to respond in their own way.

Apart from conducting an in-depth discussion with a colleague of a single transcript to compare themes and potential alternative interpretations, I carried out the analysis myself and therefore the themes reflect my personal interpretations and biases. It would have improved the study to have involved colleagues in the process of thematic analysis.

Turning to epistemological reflexivity, in Chapters One and Two I outlined my rationale for focusing on the term 'NEET' and interviewing young people who had experienced these circumstances. Although I argued that NEET is a social construction and one that is often problematic, I recognise that choosing to use this label shaped my research questions and design.

A closely related epistemological issue is how the language I used in designing the research questions and the interview schedule, influenced the joint construction of meaning between me and the interviewee. Although my research questions were broad, they and the interview structure undoubtedly steered respondents in the direction of thinking about the differences between the experience of being EET and being NEET. The research questions might have been investigated differently, had I not made a clear demarcation between being EET and NEET, for example, if I had discussed with young people in very general terms their life experiences just before, and after leaving school. However, this might be subject to ethical objections as it would have undermined the principle of informed consent, that is, people being made aware of the nature of the research.

As described, I had difficulty in recruiting young people to take part in the study and my group of interviewees was therefore obtained on a somewhat opportunistic basis. To an extent this was anticipated, given the literature about the difficulties of contacting and engaging with young people who become NEET, but I would have liked to have interviewed a broader range of young people, for example having a balance between young men and women, people from more diverse backgrounds and in a wider range of settings. As explained, my group of young people were probably not in the most disadvantaged group of NEET, which according to the research is the hardest to support.

I chose to make the study retrospective on the grounds that interviewing young people who were currently NEET might cause them undue distress, which might be ethically undesirable. I was comfortable with this decision, but it influenced the flavour of the interviews and perhaps resulted in less immediate and vivid information.

In retrospect, a specific gap in the research is that it did not involve schools. I was so focused on what happened to young people after they left school, that I overlooked the considerable role and influence of schools in preparing young people for the transition to adult life. Given the extent of the influence which young people and professionals reported, it would have been helpful to have included the perspective of a member of school staff involved with students at Key Stage 4 and beyond.

6.8 Suggestions for future research

This was a small scale exploratory study in an area of enquiry which offers numerous possibilities for future research. Five suggestions are listed below:

- Locally, it would be interesting for the EPS to work with agencies such as the Specialist Careers Service on initiatives such as evaluating the effectiveness of the outreach project described on page 162.
- EPs through developing contacts with agencies such as local FE Colleges might be able to promote the development of a 'local learning ecology' framework such as that outlined by Hodgson and Spours (2013).
- It would also add to the knowledge base locally, to explore the experiences of NEET with a wider range of young people, as I stated previously.
- Wilding's (2015) paper sets out how SDT might be applied in schools, but her hypotheses have not been tested and further studies would clarify whether SDT offers benefits for students and staff.
- Finally, another possible area for future research would be to explore how key school staff construe their role in preparing young people for life beyond school, what they think they do well and not so well and what help if any they would need (from EPs or other agencies) to support young people at risk of becoming NEET.

References

- Allen, A., and Hardy, J. (2013) The future of educational psychology. In Arnold, C., and Hardy, J. (Eds) *British Educational Psychology: The First Hundred Years*. London: The BPS.
- Andersen, S.M., Chen, S., and Carter, C. (2000) Fundamental Human Needs: Making Social Cognition Relevant. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 4, 269-318.
- Arnett, J.J. (2000) Emerging adulthood: a theory of development from the late teens through the early twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469-480.
- Arnett, J.J. (2006): Emerging Adulthood in Europe: A Response to Bynner. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9, 1, 111-123.
- Arnold, C., and Baker, T. (2012) Transitions from school to work: Applying psychology to 'NEET'. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29, 3, 67- 80.
- Arnold, C., and Hardy, J. (Eds) (2013) *British Educational Psychology: The First Hundred Years*. London: The BPS.
- Atkinson, C., Dunsmuir, S., Lang, J., and Wright, S. (2015) Developing a competency framework for the initial training of educational psychologists working with young people aged 16-25. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31, 2, 159-173.
- Audit Commission (2009) *When it comes to the crunch...* London: Audit Commission.
- Audit Commission (2010) *Against the odds – reengaging young people in education, employment or training*. London: HMSO.
- Barnardo's (2008) *Breaking the cycle*. Essex: Barnardo's.
- Barnardo's (2009) *Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training*. Full Report. Essex: Barnardo's.
- Barnardo's (2010) *Lost in transition: the urgent need to help young school leavers into employment*. Essex: Barnardo's.
- Barnardo's (2011) *Levelling the playing field: Achieving social mobility for 16 and 17-year-olds*. Essex: Barnardo's.
- Barnes, M. (2005) *Social exclusion in Great Britain: an empirical investigation and comparison with the EU*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Barry, M. (2005) *Youth Policy and Social Inclusion*. London: Routledge.

- Basit, T. (2012): '...But that's just the stereotype': gender and ethnicity in transition to adulthood. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15, 3, 405-423.
- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk society. Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Black, A.E., and Deci, E.L. (2000) The effects of student self-regulation and instructor autonomy support on learning in a college-level natural science course: A self-determination theory perspective. *Science Education*, 84, 740-756.
- Boyatzis, R.E. (1998) *Transforming Qualitative Information*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 2, 77-101.
- British Psychological Society (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*. Leicester: BPS publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2001). The Bioecological Theory of Human Development. In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed) *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*. Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed) (2001) *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*. Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage.
- Brunila, K. (2012) Hooked on a feeling: education, guidance and rehabilitation of youth at risk. *Critical Studies in Education, iFirst*, 1–14.
- Burnham, J. (1988) *Family therapy: First steps towards a systemic approach*. London: Routledge.
- Burr, V. (2003) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. (2nd Ed) London: Routledge.
- Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (1979) *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. London: Heinemann Educational.
- Bynner, J. (2001) British Youth Transitions in Comparative Perspective. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 4:1, 5-23.
- Bynner, J. (2005) Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-course: The Case for Emerging Adulthood? *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8:4, 367-384.

- Bynner, J. (2012) Policy Reflections Guided by Longitudinal Study, Youth Training, Social Exclusion, and More Recently Neet. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60, 1, 39-52.
- Bynner, J., and Parsons, S. (2002) Social Exclusion and the Transition from School to Work: the case of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 60, 289-309.
- Bynner, J. and Roberts, K. (Eds) (1991) *Youth and Work: Transition to Employment in England and Germany*. London: Anglo-German Foundation.
- Bynner, J., and Silbereisen, R.K. (Eds.) (2000) *Adversity and challenge in the life course in England and Germany*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.
- Carr, W. (1995) *For education: towards critical educational inquiry*. Buckingham: OUP.
- Castells, M., 1998. *The end of the millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chadderton, C., and Colley, H. (2012) School-to-work transition services: marginalising 'disposable' youth in a state of exception? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 33, 3, 329-343.
- Charmaz, K. (2008) Grounded Theory. In Smith, J.A. (Ed) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. (2nd ed) London: Sage.
- Cicchetti, D., and Cohen, D.J. (Eds) (2006) *Developmental psychopathology: risk, disorder and adaptation*. Vol 3 (2nd ed) Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*. (6th ed) Oxon: Routledge.
- Côté, J., and Bynner, J. (2008) Changes in the transition to adulthood in the UK and Canada: the role of structure and agency in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11, 3, 251-268.
- Cotterell, J. (2007) *Social networks in youth and adolescence*. (2nd ed). London: Routledge
- Craig, L.J. (2009) Post-School transitions: Exploring practice in one local authority. In Mackay, T., and Hellier, C. (Eds) Post-School Psychological Services. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 26, 1, 67-75.
- Currie, R., and Goodall, L. (2009) Using collaborative action research to identify and support young people at risk of becoming 'NEET.' In Mackay, T., and Hellier, C. (Eds) Post-School Psychological Services. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 26, 1, 67-75.

Davis, J. (2007) Analysing Participation and Social Exclusion With Children and Young People. Lessons From Practice. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15, 121–146.

Deci, E.L., and Ryan, R.M. (1985) *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.

Deci, E.L., and Ryan, R.M. (2000) The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227-268.

Deci, E.L., and Ryan, R.M. (2008a) Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being Across Life's Domains. *Canadian Psychology*, 49, 1, 14-23.

Deci, E.L., and Ryan, R.M. (2008b) Self-Determination Theory: A Macrotheory of Human Motivation, Development, and Health. *Canadian Psychology*, 49, 3, 182-185.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *Education and Skills Bill*. Norwich: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Raising Expectations: Staying in Education and Training post-16*. Norwich: HMSO.

Department for Education (2013). *Raising the Participation Age (RPA)*. London: DfE

Department for Education and Department of Health (2015) *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years* (January 2015). London: DfE.

De Vaus, D. A. (2001) *Research Design in Social Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Dowling, E. (2003) Theoretical framework: A joint systems approach to educational problems with children. In Dowling, E., and Osborne, E. (Eds) *The Family and the school: a joint systems approach to problems with children* (2nd ed). London: Karnac Books.

Dowling, E., and Osborne, E. (Eds) (2003) *The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children* (2nd ed). London: Karnac Books

DuBois D. L., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J.E., Silverthorn, N., and Valentine, J.C. (2011) How Effective Are Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 12, 2, 57–91.

- Easton, G. (2010) Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39, 118–128.
- Ecclestone, K., and Hayes, D. (2009). *The dangerous rise of therapeutic education*. London: Routledge.
- England and Wales. Statutes (2012). *Education Act 2011. Chapter 21*. London: The Stationery Office.
- Erikson, E.H. (1963) *Childhood and society*. (2nd ed) New York: Norton.
- Evans, K. (2000) Educational systems and transitions. In Bynner, J., and Silbereisen, R.K. (Eds.), *Adversity and challenge in the life course in England and Germany*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.
- Fergusson, R. (2013): Against disengagement: non-participation as an object of governance. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 18:1-2, 12-28.
- Filmer-Sankey, C. and McCrone, T. (2012). *Developing Indicators for Early Identification of Young People at Risk of Temporary Disconnection from Learning: Summary* (NFER Research Programme: From Education to Employment). Slough: NFER.
- Finlay, I., Sheridan, M., McKay, J., & Nudzor, H. (2010) Young people on the margins: in need of more choices and more chances in twenty-first century Scotland, *British Educational Research Journal*, 36:5, 851-867.
- Flum, H., and Blustein, D. L. (2000) Reinvigorating the study of vocational exploration: A framework for research. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 56, 3, 380–404.
- Frith, H., and Gleeson, K. (2004) Clothing and embodiment: men managing body image and appearance. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 5, 40-48.
- Frost, N. (2011) *Qualitative Research Methods In Psychology: Combining Core Approaches*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: McGraw Hill Education.
- Furlong, A. (2007). The zone of precarity and discourses of vulnerability: NEET in the UK. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 381, 101–121.
- Furlong, A. (2009a) *Handbook of youth and young adulthood: new perspectives and agendas*. London: Routledge.
- Furlong, A. (2009b): Revisiting transitional metaphors: reproducing social inequalities under the conditions of late modernity. *Journal of Education and Work*, 22, 5, 343-353.
- Furlong, A., and Cartmel, F. (2007) *Young people and social change: new perspectives*. Buckingham: OU Press.

- Golden, S., Spielhofer, T., Sims, D., and O'Donnell, L. (2004) *Supporting the Hardest-to-Reach Young People: The Contribution of the Neighbourhood Support Fund*. London: DfES.
- Goodwin, J., and O'Connor, H. (2007) Continuity and change in the experiences of transition from school to work. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26, 5, 555-572.
- Goodwin, J., and O'Connor, H. (2009) Continuity and change in 40 years of school to work transitions. *Journal of Education and Work*, 22, 5, 341-342.
- Gorard, S., and Taylor, C. (2004). *Combining methods in educational and social research*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Gray, D, E. (2009) *Doing Research in the Real World*. (2nd ed). London: Sage.
- Grolnick, W. S., Kurowski, C. O., Dunlap, K. G., & Hevey, C. (2000). Parental resources and the transition to junior high. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 10, 465–488.
- Grolnick, W. S., Ryan, R. M., and Deci, E. (1991). Inner resources for school achievement: Motivational mediators of children's perceptions of their parents. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83, 508–517.
- Guay, F., Ratelle, C. F., & Chanal, J. (2008). Optimal learning in optimal contexts: The role of self-determination in education. *Canadian Psychology*, 49, 233–240.
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K., and Namey, E. (2012) *Applied thematic analysis*. London: Sage.
- Hall, G.S. (1904). *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Harter, S. (1981) A New Self-Report Scale of Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Orientation in the Classroom: Motivational and Informational Components. *Developmental Psychology*, 17, 3, 300-312.
- Haughey, A. (2009) Pupils disengaged from school: Evaluation of an alternative vocational education programme. In Mackay, T., and Hellier, C. (Eds) *Post-School Psychological Services*. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 26, 1, 67-75.
- Hayward, G., and Williams, R. (2011) Joining the big society: am I bothered? *London Review of Education*, 9:2, 175-189.
- Health Professions Council (2008). *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics*. London: HPC Publications.

- Heinz, W. R. (1990) The transition from school to work in crisis: Coping with threatening unemployment. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 2, 127–141.
- Hendry, L.B., and Kloep, M. (2010) How universal is emerging adulthood? An empirical example. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13:2, 169-179.
- Hitchcock, G., and Hughes, D. (1995) *Research and the Teacher: A Qualitative Introduction to School-Based Research* (2nd ed.) London: Routledge.
- HM Government (2011) Building Engagement, Building Futures: Our Strategy to Maximise the Participation of 16-24 Year Olds in Education, Training and Work. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-engagement-building-futures> (Accessed 2 May 2015)
- Hodgson, A., and Spours, K. (2013) Tackling the crisis facing young people: building 'high opportunity progression eco-systems'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39, 2, 211-228.
- Hoggart, L. and Smith, D.I. (2004), "Understanding the impact of connexions on young people at risk." Available at: www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR607.pdf (Accessed 13 July 2013).
- Holland, J. and Thomson, R. (2009) GAINING PERSPECTIVE ON CHOICE AND FATE. *European Societies*, 11, 3, 451-469.
- Independent Commission on Fees (2014) *Analysis of trends in higher education applications, admissions, and enrolments*. Available at: www.independentcommissionfees.org.uk/.../ICoF-Report-Aug-2014.pdf (Accessed 17 Feb 2015)
- International Labour Organisation (2012) *Global Employment Trends 2012*. Geneva: ILO.
- Jeffs, T., and Smith, M. (1998) The problem of 'youth' for youth work. *Youth and Policy*, 62, 45–66.
- Joussemet, M., Landry, R., and Koestner, R. (2008) a self-determination theory perspective on parenting. *Canadian Psychology*, 49, 194-200.
- Kenny, M.E., Walsh-Blair, L.Y., Blustein, D.L., Bempechat, J., and Seltzer, J. (2010) Achievement motivation among urban adolescents: Work hope, autonomy support, and achievement-related beliefs. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77, 2, 205 – 212.
- Kettlewell, K., Stevens, E., O'Beirne, C. and Everett, H. (2014) *School Approaches to Supporting Students to Remain Engaged at Key Stage 4: Baseline Case Study Report*. Slough: NFER.

La Guardia, J.G. (2009) Developing Who I Am: A Self-Determination Theory Approach to the Establishment of Healthy Identities. *Educational Psychologist*, 44, 2, 90-104.

Langley, E., Hooley, T., and Bertuchi, D. (2014) *A career postcode lottery? Local authority provision of youth and career support following the 2011 Education Act*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies.

Lawy, R., and Wheeler, R. (2013) The experiences of long-term unemployed young adults in the South West of England: some new insights. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 18, 1-2, 159-174.

Levitas, R. (2005) *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lumby, J. (2012) Disengaged and disaffected: surviving the system. *British Educational Research Journal*. 38,2, 261-279.

Luthar, S.S. (2006) Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In Cicchetti, D., and Cohen, D.J. (Eds) *Developmental psychopathology: risk, disorder and adaptation*. Vol 3 (2nd ed) Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Luthar, S.S., and Cicchetti, D. (2000) The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies. *Development and Psychopathology*, 12, 857–885.

Luthar, S.S., Cicchetti, D., and Becker, B. (2000) The construct of resilience. A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development*, 71, 543–562.

Mackay, T., and Hellier, C. (Eds) (2009) *Post-School Psychological Services*. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 26, 1.

Maguire, S. (2013) Will raising the participation age in England solve the NEET problem? *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 18, 1-2, 61-76.

Masten, A.S. (2001) Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development. *American Psychologist*, 56, 3, 227-238.

Masten, A.S., Best, K.M., and Garmezy, N. (1990) Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity, *Development and Psychopathology*, 2, 425–444.

McDonald, S., Erickson, L.D., Kirkpatrick Johnson, M., and Elder, G.H. (2007) Informal mentoring and young adult employment. *Social Science Research*, 36, 1328–1347.

McLeod, A. (2008) 'Whose Agenda? Issues of Power and Relationship when Listening to Looked-after Young People'. *Child & Family Social Work*, 2, 3, 278 - 86.

Mirza-Davies, J. (2014) *NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training*. London: House of Commons Library.

Mirza-Davies, J. (2015) *Youth unemployment statistics*. London: House of Commons Library.

Morris, K., Barnes, M., and Mason, P. (2009) *Children, Families and Social Exclusion*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Murray, M. (2008) Narrative psychology. In Smith, J.A. (Ed) (2008) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. (2nd ed) London: Sage.

[Name of Council] (2014) *Economic Conditions Scorecard*. Available at: [http://eservices.\[Council\].gov.uk/mglInternet/documents/s4493/Economic%20ConditionsFebruary%20scorecard.pdf](http://eservices.[Council].gov.uk/mglInternet/documents/s4493/Economic%20ConditionsFebruary%20scorecard.pdf) (Accessed: 21 Feb 2015)

[Name of Council] (2014) *Unemployment Briefing*. Available at: [http://www.\[Name of Council\].gov.uk/Portals/0/KeyStats/UnemploymentBriefing/2015/UnempBriefing201505.pdf](http://www.[Name of Council].gov.uk/Portals/0/KeyStats/UnemploymentBriefing/2015/UnempBriefing201505.pdf) (Accessed: 21 Feb 2015)

Niemiec, C. P., Lynch, M. F., Vansteenkiste, M., Bernstein, J., Deci, E. L., and Ryan, R. M. (2006). The antecedents and consequences of autonomous self-regulation for college: A SDT perspective on socialization. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29, 761–775.

Niemiec, C.P., and Ryan, R.M. (2009) Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying SDT to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7, 2, 133–144.

Nudzor, H.P. (2009) A critical commentary on combined methods approach to researching educational and social issues. *Issues in Educational Research*, 19, 2, 114 – 127.

Office for National Statistics (2012). *Statistical Bulletin. Labour Market Statistics: March 2012*. Available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/march-2012/statistical-bulletin.html>. (Accessed 21 Feb 2015)

Office for National Statistics (2013). *UK Estimate of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. Quarterly UK NEET estimate*.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2008) *Jobs for Youth: United Kingdom*. Paris: OECD.

OSPA Project (2013) *Working with Young People Aged 16-25 – Competency framework*. Available at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ospa-project/competencyframework.html> (Accessed: 15 Nov 2014)

Parker, I. (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Individual and Social Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Patton, M.Q. (1990) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. (2nd Ed) Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Pelletier, L. G., Fortier, M. S., Vallerand, R. J., & Briere, N. M. (2001). Associations among perceived autonomy support, forms of self-regulation, and persistence: A prospective study. *Motivation and Emotion*, 25, 279–306.

Pemberton, (2008) Tackling the NEET generation and the ability of policy to generate a 'NEET' solution: evidence from the UK. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 26, 243- 259.

Phillips, R.F. (2010) Initiatives to support disadvantaged young people: enhancing social capital and acknowledging personal capital. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13, 4, 489-504.

Potter, J., and Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and social psychology: beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.

Pring, R. (2000) *The Philosophy of Educational Research*. London: Continuum.

Raffe, D. (2003) Pathways Linking Education and Work: A Review of Concepts, Research, and Policy Debates. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6, 1, 3–19.

Roberts, K. (2013) Career guidance in England today: reform, accidental injury or attempted murder? *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 41, 3, 240-253.

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers* (2nd Ed). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Rose, H., Daiches, A., and Potier, J. (2012) Meaning of Social Inclusion to Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 22, 3, 256-268.

Russell, L. (2013) Researching marginalised young people. *Ethnography and Education*, 8, 1, 46-60.

Rutter, M. (1987) Psychological resilience and protective mechanisms, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57, 316–331.

Rutter, M. (2007). Commentary: Resilience, competence, and coping. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 31,3, 205-209.

Rutter, M., and Madge, N. (1976) *Cycles of disadvantage: A review of research*. London: Heinemann.

Ryan, R.M., and Deci, E.L. (2000) Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.

Ryan, R.M., La Guardia, J.G., Solky-Butzel, J., Chirkov, V., and Kim, Y. (2005) On the interpersonal regulation of emotions: Emotional reliance across gender, relationships, and culture. *Personal Relationships*, 12, 146-163.

Sale, J., Lohfeld, L., and Brazil, K. (2002) Revisiting the quantitative-qualitative debate: implications for mixed-methods research. *Quality and Quantity*, 36, 43–53.

Sanderson, H. (2000) *Person-centred planning: Key features and approaches*. Available at: <http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/media/14192/person%20centred%20planning%20Key%20Features%20and%20approaches.pdf> (Accessed: 6 June 2015)

Schoon, I., and Bynner, J. (2003): Risk and Resilience in the Life Course: Implications for Interventions and Social Policies, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6, 1, 21-31.

Scottish Executive (2006). *More Choices, More Chances: A strategy to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Author.

Scottish Government (2008). *What does 16+ learning choices mean to More Choices, More Chances?* Edinburgh: Author.

Sheehy, K., Kumrai, R., and Woodhead, M. (2011) Young people's experiences of personal advisors and the Connexions service. *Equality Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 30, 3, 168-182.

Sheldon, K.M., Elliot, A.J., Ryan, R.M., Chirkov, V., Kim, Y., Wu, C., et al. (2004) Self-concordance and well-being in four cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35, 209-223.

Shildrick, T., and MacDonald, R. (2007) Biographies of exclusion: poor work and poor transitions. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26, 5, 589-604.

Simmons, R., Russell, L., and Thompson, R. (2014) Young people and labour market marginality: findings from a longitudinal ethnographic study. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17, 5, 577-591.

- Simmons, R., and Thompson, R. (2013) Reclaiming the disengaged: critical perspectives on young people not in education, employment or training. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 18, 1-2, 1-11.
- Smith, J.A. (2004) Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1, 39-54.
- Smith, J.A. (Ed) (2008) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. (2nd ed) London: Sage.
- Smith, J.A., Flowers, P. and Larkin, M. (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London: Sage.
- Smith, J.A. and Osborn, M. (2008) Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In Smith, J.A. (Ed) (2008) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. (2nd ed) London: Sage.
- Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16–18 Year-Olds Not in Education Employment or Training*. London: The Stationery Office.
- Social Exclusion Unit (2000) *Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People* London: HMSO.
- Soenens, B., and Vansteenkiste, M. (2005). Antecedents and outcomes of self-determination in three life domains: The role of parents' and teachers' autonomy support. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34, 6, 589-604.
- Southcott, C., Stevens, E., Featherstone, G. and McCrone, T. (2013). *Indicators to Identify the Disengaged* (NFER Research Programme: From Education to Employment). Slough: NFER.
- Spandler, H. (2007) From social exclusion to inclusion? A critique of the inclusion imperative in mental health. *Medical Sociology Online*, 2, 3–16.
- Spielhofer, T., Benton, T., Evans, K., Featherstone, G., Golden, S., Nelson, J. and Smith, P. (2009a). *Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People Who Do Not Participate in Education or Training at 16 and 17* (DCSF Research Report 072). London: DCSF.
- Spielhofer, T., Marson-Smith, H., and Evans, K. (2009b). *Non-formal learning: good practice in re-engaging young people who are NEET*. Slough: NFER.
- Stevens, E., Kettlewell, K., Martin, K. and Featherstone, G. (2014). *NEET Prevention: Keeping students engaged at Key Stage 4: Second case study report*. Slough: NFER.

Stokes, H., and Wyn, J. (2007) Constructing identities and making careers: young people's perspectives on work and learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26, 5, 495-51.

Svinicki, M.D., and Vogler, J.S. (2012) Motivation and Learning: Modern Theories. *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*, 2336 – 2339.

The West Midlands Continuing Professional Development Group (2014) *16-25 years – sharing good practice conference*. University of Birmingham, 6 November. WMCPD.

Thomas, G. (2009) *How to do Your Case Study: A Guide for Student Researchers*. London: Sage.

Thompson, R. (2011) Individualisation and social exclusion: the case of young people not in education, employment or training. *Oxford Review of Education*, 37, 6, 785-802.

Thompson, R., Russell, L., and Simmons, R. (2014) Space, place and social exclusion: an ethnographic study of young people outside education and employment, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17, 1, 63-78.

Trotter, J., & Campbell, C. (2008) Participation in Decision Making: Disempowerment, Disappointment and Different Directions. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 2, 3, 262-275.

Turnbull, G., and Spence, J. (2011) What's at risk? The proliferation of risk across child and youth policy in England, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14, 8, 939-959.

UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2007) *Child poverty in perspective: an overview of child well-being in rich countries*. Geneva: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2012) *Measuring Child Poverty: New league tables of child poverty in the world's rich countries*. Innocenti Report Card 10, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Valentine, G., Butler, R., and Skelton, T. (2010) The Ethical and Methodological Complexities of Doing Research with 'Vulnerable' Young People. *Ethics Policy and Environment*, 4, 2, 119-125.

Vallerand, R.J., Fortier, M.S., and Guay, F. (1997) Self-Determination and Persistence in a Real-Life Setting: Toward a Motivational Model of High School Dropout. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 5, 1161-1176.

Vallerand, R.J., Pelletier, L.G., and Koestner, R. (2008) Reflections on Self-determination theory. *Canadian Psychology*, 49, 3, 257-262.

Van Petegem, S., Beyers, W., Vansteenkiste, M., & Soenens, B. (2012). On the association between adolescent autonomy and psychosocial functioning: Examining decisional independence from a self-determination theory perspective. *Developmental Psychology*, 48, 76-88.

Wandeler, C.A., and Bundick, M.J. (2011) Hope and self-determination of young adults in the workplace. *The Journal of Positive Psychology: Dedicated to furthering research and promoting good practice*, 6, 5, 341-354.

Werner, E.E., and Smith, R.S. (1992) *Overcoming the Odds. High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

White, R.W. (1959) Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review*, 66, 5, 297-333.

Wilding, L. (2015) The application of self-determination theory to support students experiencing disaffection. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 32, 2, 137- 149.

Williams, G. C., and Deci, E. L. (1996). Internalization of biopsychological values by medical students: A test of SDT. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology*, 70: 767–779.

Williams, J. (2011) Raising expectations or constructing victims? Problems with promoting social inclusion through lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30, 4, 451-467.

Willig, C. (2008a). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. (2nd ed) Buckingham: Open University Press.

Willig, C. (2008b) Discourse analysis. In Smith, J.A. (Ed) (2008) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. (2nd ed) London: Sage.

Wilson, S., Cunningham-Burley, S., Bancroft, A., and Backett-Milburn, K. (2008). Joined up thinking? Unsupported 'fast-track' transitions in the context of parental substance abuse. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11, 3, 283–299.

Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of Vocational Education: the Wolf Report*. London: DFE.

World Development Indicators database, World Bank, 16 December 2014. Available at: databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf9. (Accessed 17 February, 2015)

Yardley, L. (2008) Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. In Smith, J.A. (Ed) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. (2nd ed) London: Sage.

Yates, S., and Payne, M. (2006) Not so NEET? A Critique of the Use of 'NEET' in Setting Targets for Interventions with Young People. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9, 3, 329-344.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., and Mortimer, J. T. (2006). Adolescent work, vocational development, and education. *Review of Educational Research*, 76, 4, 537–566.

Zuroff, D.C., Koestner, R., Moskowitz, D.S., McBride, C., Bagby, M., and Marshall, M. (2007) Autonomous motivation for therapy: A new non-specific predictor of outcome in brief treatments of depression. *Psychotherapy Research*, 17, 137-148.

Appendix 1: Interview schedule used with the young people

NEETS – RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Hi X, my name is Jenet Gabriel. Many thanks for meeting me today – this is as part of a research project I'm carrying out with the University of Birmingham.

I also work with young people in () Council as an Educational Psychologist. My job is to help children and young people to have a positive experience of school and life.

My research project is about young people like you, who have been in the situation of not having a job, a college placement or an apprenticeship for a time after leaving school, but who are no longer in this situation. You may have heard of the word 'NEET', which is used by the Government to describe young people who are not in education, employment or training, and I will use this word in our discussion today.

I am interested in finding out how young people handled this time of their lives and what they found helpful. I would also like to find out how they have been getting on since that time.

What we're going to do today is to have a chat, where I'll ask you some questions and to do some practical things such as using rating scales. Our meeting will last about an hour.

There are no wrong or right answers to these questions and I really want to hear what **you** think and feel about them. I will record the interviews if you are happy for me to do so, or else I will take notes.

I will keep your answers private. However, if I am concerned about your safety, I will talk to someone about this to try to help you. If I am going to do this, I will talk to you about it first.

To ensure your confidentiality the recording will be typed up as quickly as possible and deleted from the recorder, and the interviews will be typed up using made-up names. Only my supervisor Jane, the university examiners and I will see these typed up interviews.

The names of everyone taking part will be kept confidential, I will not include these in the report I write and I will be careful to make sure that they can't be identified by anyone reading the report. All notes and recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet which only I can open.

[Show the young person the consent form s/he signed, and check s/he's happy to continue]. You can at any time change your mind about being part of this

project, so you can leave this meeting at any time without giving a reason and you can ask for your information not to be used in the study up until June 2014.

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Note: the questions have been organised so that the starting point is the participant's current experiences, then moves to past experiences of being NEET, and finally explores the participant's views about the future. This format seems more naturalistic (starting with the 'here and now') and also anticipates that potentially more sensitive topics (the experience of being NEET) are covered once the young person has been put at ease. The activities are intended to support the young person but I will need to make sure that literacy difficulties aren't a barrier.

As further support for the discussion, I will prepare 3 A3 sheets of paper in landscape to cover 'the present – what's happening now?'; 'the past - the time when you found yourself without a job or college placement or training' and 'the future'. The questions relating to each time scale will be set out on each sheet (see example below) and the sheets can be used flexibly to support the discussion e.g. simply as prompt; space to draw/write etc.

<i>The present – what's happening now?</i>
<i>a. What you're doing at the moment</i>
<i>b. What you think/feel about what you're doing now</i>
<i>c. How this fits with what you hope to do with your life</i>
<i>Etc</i>

1. Establishing rapport

Putting the young person at ease: general 'ice breaker' small talk (e.g. ease of getting to the meeting today; general discussion about where the young person lives; interests in spare time etc)

First, are you ok to tell me a bit about yourself?

Age

Where you live/who lives with you

What do you like doing in your spare time?

2. The present: Start with the young person's current situation

- a. What are you doing at the moment? (get practical details e.g. if at college/training – type/length/qualifications of course; if working – type of work, full or part time, temporary/permanent etc) Explore living arrangements, sources of support, financial situation.

- b. What do you think/feel about what you're doing now? *(use sort cards with descriptions of emotions)*

Disappointed	Hopeful
Relieved	Stressed
Relaxed	Proud
Gloomy	Optimistic
Fed up	Sad
Bored	Worried
Pessimistic	Angry
Other	Frustrated
Confident	Motivated
Happy	Calm
Excited	

When s/he has chosen the descriptions, probe further as to why the young person made these choices and encourage her/him to scale the extent: how much/often do you feel like this? Any reasons why you feel like this?

Ask the young person to sort the cards into 5 piles:

I never felt this
I rarely felt this
I sometimes felt this
I often felt this
I almost always felt this

- c. *For items c and d, use a rating scale where 0 is 'very bad/negative', 1 is 'quite bad/negative', 3 is 'neither bad nor good/neutral', 4 is 'quite good/positive' and 5 is 'very good/positive'.*

Very bad Quite bad Neither good nor bad Quite good Very good

Could you put a cross along the line to say how you feel about what you're doing with your life at the moment?

Further probes relating to the rating the young person gave for the previous scale: Is there anything good (positive) about what you're doing just now?

- d. *Is there anything not good (not positive) about what you're doing just now?*
- e. *How does what you're doing at the moment fit with what you hope to do with your life?*

- f. How do you think other people see you at the moment? *Prompt the young person to consider family; friends; adults who teach them or work with them and possibly wider society. If appropriate, relate back to the young person's responses to the rating scale.*
- g. What do you feel is helping or not helping you in your life at the moment? *Use large sheet of flip chart paper divided into two sections with headings 'Helped me' and 'Didn't help me'. Prompts under the headings: Personal factors – things I did/thought/felt; other people – things they did/thought/felt; things in the situation/events.*

3. The past: Looking back to the time when you found yourself without a job or college placement or training –

- h. Could you tell me what led up to this happening?
- i. Looking back, why do you think it happened?
- j. What was it like: can you remember how you thought/felt about your situation at the time? *(use sort cards with descriptions of emotions)*

Disappointed	Hopeful
Relieved	Stressed
Relaxed	Proud
Gloomy	Optimistic
Fed up	Sad
Bored	Worried
Pessimistic	Angry
Other	Frustrated
Confident	Motivated
Happy	Calm
Excited	

When s/he has chosen the descriptions, probe further as to why the young person made these choices and encourage him/her to scale the extent: how much/often did you feel like this? Any reasons why you felt like this?

Ask the young person to sort the cards into 5 piles:

- I never felt this*
- I rarely felt this*
- I sometimes felt this*
- I often felt this*

I almost always felt this

- k. For items k and l, use a rating scale where 0 is 'very bad/negative', 1 is 'quite bad/negative', 3 is 'neither bad nor good/neutral', 4 is 'quite good/positive' and 5 is 'very good/positive'.

Could you put a cross along the line to say how you felt about your life at the time?

Further probes relating to the rating the young person gave for the previous scale: Was there anything good about this time of your life?

- l. Was there anything not good about this time of your life?
- m. How did what you were doing fit with what you hoped to do with your life?
- n. What do you feel helped/didn't help you at this time in your life? *Use large sheet of flip chart paper divided into two sections with headings 'Helped me' and 'Didn't help me'. Prompts under the headings: Personal factors – things I did/thought/felt; other people – things they did/thought/felt; things in the situation/events.*
- o. What did you try to do about the situation?
- p. What helped to change the situation? (prompt – e.g. personal qualities – things I did/thought/felt; other people – things they did/thought/felt; organisational/practical changes)
- q. How did other people see you at the time? *Prompt the young person to consider family; friends; adults who taught them or worked with them and possibly wider society. If appropriate, relate to questions k/l using the rating scale*
- r. Looking back, is there anything that could have made the situation better for you at the time?
Explore the young person's locus of control/sense of self efficacy – the extent to which s/he perceives him or herself as having agency/control over events. Also prompt for the young person's perceptions re what friends/family/other agencies could have done.
- s. How do you think this time of your life has changed you, and in what ways?

4. **The future -**

- t. Where do you see yourself in a few years time?
- u. What might get in the way of your plans?
- v. What will help you to get to where you want to be?

Explore the young person's locus of control/sense of self efficacy – the extent to which s/he perceives him or herself as having agency/control over events. Also prompt for the young person's perceptions re how friends/family/other agencies could help.

Appendix 2: Information sheet for the young people

Thanks for saying that you might like to take part in my research project. This letter gives you some more information about the project to help you decide whether or not you would like to take part.

My name is Jennet Gabriel. I work with young people in () Council as an Educational Psychologist. My job is to support children and young people to have a positive experience of school and life.

I am studying to complete a doctorate at the University of Birmingham and my University Supervisor is called Jane Leadbetter.

My research project is about young people who have been in the situation of not having a job, a college placement or an apprenticeship for a time after leaving school, but who are no longer in this situation. The Government uses the word NEET to describe young people who are not in education, employment or training, and I will use this word in my project.

I am interested in finding out how young people handled this time of their lives and what they found helpful. I would also like to find out how they have been getting on since that time.

I am hoping to gather the views of young people aged between 17 and 25, who have experienced at least 6 months of being NEET, but who are now no longer NEET. It doesn't matter if they have only just stopped being NEET or if this happened up to 18 months before.

If you agree to take part in this project, I would meet you in a place that you feel comfortable for between one hour and one and a half hours. We might meet on more than one occasion if there is a lot to talk about. Possible places to meet could include my office, your college or a library.

I will ask you some questions to help get the conversation started, but there are no wrong or right answers!

I will record the interviews if you are happy for me to do so, or else I will take notes.

To ensure your confidentiality the recording will be typed up as quickly as possible and deleted from the recorder, and the interviews will be typed up using made-up names. Only my supervisor Jane, the university examiners and I will see these typed up interviews.

The names of people taking part will be kept confidential, I will not include these in the report I write and I will be careful to make sure that they can't be identified by anyone reading the report. All notes and recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet which only I can open.

You would be able to contact me at any time on a mobile before or after the meetings if you have any questions.

If you agree to take part, you can at any time change your mind about being part of the study, you can ask not to be included, you can leave an interview without giving a reason and you can ask for your information not to be used in the study up until June 2014.

Please keep this information sheet in a safe place in case you want to read it again in the future.

The findings from my project will be used in the following ways:

- As part of my University Doctoral Thesis
- In a report for people working with young people in () Council summarising findings and making recommendations
- In reports for professionals working with young people across UK
- I hope the findings may be used to try and improve services.

If you are interested in taking part:

- You can complete and return the form below to the address given
- You can e-mail your name and details to [REDACTED]
- You can contact me by telephone or text on [REDACTED]

Thank You!!

Your name _____ (please write your full name in capitals)

Your age _____

I was not in education, employment or training between _____ and _____
(please put in the month and year you became NEET and stopped being NEET)

Your contact telephone number/email _____

I (please write your name)

_____ would like to take part in the study looking at young people's experiences of being NEET

Appendix 3: Consent form for young people

I have read the information sheet and understand that:

<i>My taking part is voluntary.....</i>	<i>Please tick:</i>
If I decide to, I can leave an interview at any point.	
I can choose to withdraw from the study at any point and ask for my interview information not to be used in the study up until June 2014.	
My views will be kept confidential unless I say anything that suggests I or another are at risk from harm - if this is the case Jennet will talk to your tutor/supervisor and they will take action to safeguard those at risk	
I will receive £10 for taking part	
My views will be recorded, typed-up with a different name and kept locked in a filing cabinet that only Jennet Gabriel has access to. Computer records will be kept on the () Council Secure Network. Records will be kept for 10 years.	
I agree to anonymised quotes being used as part of the study.	
The results of the study will be used in Jennet's university doctoral thesis, shared with those working in () Council and may be written up for professional journals or shared at conferences for people working with young people who are not in education, employment or training. () Council will not be named when reporting outside () Council.	

Signed.....Date.....

If you have cause for any complaint about this study please contact Principal Educational Psychologist , () Council

Or: Jane Leadbetter, University of Birmingham Research Supervisor, School Of Education, University of Birmingham, B15 2TT [REDACTED] or telephone [REDACTED]

Appendix 4: Consent form for parents of young people aged less than eighteen

EXAMPLE LETTER TO PARENT REQUESTING PERMISSION FOR THEIR SON/DAUGHTER TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY

Dear Parent

Your son/daughter has expressed an interest in taking part in my research project, and I am writing to ask for your consent for him/her to take part. This letter gives you some more information about the project to help you decide whether or not you would like him/her to take part.

My name is Jenet Gabriel. I work with young people in () Council as an Educational Psychologist. My job is to support children and young people to have a positive experience of school and life.

I am studying to complete a doctorate at the University of Birmingham and my University Supervisor is Dr Jane Leadbetter.

My research project is about young people who have been in the situation of not having a job, a college placement or an apprenticeship for a time after leaving school, but who are no longer in this situation. The Government uses the word NEET to describe young people who are not in education, employment or training, and I will use this word in my project.

I am interested in finding out how young people handled this time of their lives and what they found helpful. I would also like to find out how they have been getting on since that time.

I am hoping to gather the views of young people aged between 17 and 25, who have experienced at least 6 months of being NEET, but who are now no longer NEET. It doesn't matter if they have only just stopped being NEET or if this happened up to 18 months before.

If you agree that your son/daughter is able to take part in this project, I would meet him/her in a place that feels comfortable for between one hour and one and a half hours. We might meet on more than one occasion if there is a lot to talk about. Possible places to meet could include my office, at college or a library.

To thank your son/daughter for taking part, s/he will receive £10 after the meeting.

I will ask your son/daughter some questions to help get the conversation started, but there are no wrong or right answers!

I will record the interviews if you and your son/daughter are happy for me to do so, or else I will take notes.

To ensure your son/daughter's confidentiality the recording will be typed up as quickly as possible and deleted from the recorder, and the interviews will be typed up using made-up names. Only my supervisor Jane, the university examiners and I will see these typed up interviews.

The names of the young people taking part will be kept confidential, I will not include these in the report I write and I will be careful to make sure that they can't be identified by anyone reading the report. All notes and recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet which only I can open.

You would be able to contact me at any time on a mobile before or after the meetings if you have any questions.

If you agree for your son/daughter to take part, you can at any time change your mind about him/her being part of the study, you can ask for him/her not to be included and you can ask for his/her information not to be used in the study up until June 2014.

Please keep this information sheet in a safe place in case you want to read it again in the future.

The findings from my project will be used in the following ways:

- As part of my University Doctoral Thesis
- In a report for people working with young people in () Council summarising findings and making recommendations
- In reports for professionals working with young people across UK
- I hope the findings may be used to try and improve services.

If you agree that your son/daughter can take part:

- Please complete and return the form below to the address given
- You can e-mail the form to jgabriel@Council.gov.uk

Thank You.

Jennet Gabriel

Educational Psychologist

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

**Title of Research project: Young people's experiences of moving out of NEET
(not in education, employment or training): An exploration of significant factors**

I give permission for my son/daughter to take part in this study, if they consent.

I understand the following (Please tick each box):

☐ My son/daughter will be informed that they have the right to
withdraw at any time

☐ The information that my son/daughter provides will be dealt with confidentially

Signed.....Date.....

Please return to: Jennet Gabriel, Educational Psychology Service, () Council

If you have cause for any complaint about this study please contact Principal
Educational Psychologist, () Council

or

Jane Leadbetter, University of Birmingham Research Supervisor, School Of Education,
University of Birmingham, B15 2TT

j.v.leadbetter@bham.ac.uk or telephone 0121 414 4880.

Appendix 5: Interview schedule used with the professionals

FOCUSED INTERVIEWS WITH SUPPORT AGENCIES

1. Please could you give an outline of your role
2. What has been your involvement with young people who have previously been not in education, employment and training (NEET)? Without breaking confidentiality, can you summarise the experiences of one or two individuals?
3. How do you think the experience of having been NEET has practically and emotionally impacted on the young people with whom you're involved (for example, their living arrangements, financial pressures, family relationships, and on their sense of identity, motivation, expectations and resilience)?
4. What progress are they making currently and what has been the impact on your organisation?
5. Do you think that their experience is typical of young people who find themselves in this situation – if so, why, if not, why not?
6. Based on your experience, what best supports young people to manage this situation and move out of it? (e.g. practical, individual factors/family factors/support from the wider community – schools, support services etc.)
7. What do you see as the barriers in the system locally that prevent or discourage young people moving from school into education, employment or training? What would facilitate education institutions/support services/employers/local authority to make better provision for young people?

Appendix 6: Extract from grid with initial coding derived from one interview transcript (interviewee E)

2g: What's helping?

Data extract	Coded for: (comments in bold are my reflections on what E has said)
<p>Interviewer asks about personal qualities – initially says don't know – interviewer has to encourage her not to be modest</p> <p><i>I think it's the fact that I know that I'm not, well I know that I am quite clever and I'm not ...I'm not silly and I'm not dumb and that I know I'm capable of doing it and doing it to the best of my ability.</i></p> <p>(E: p 15)</p> <p><i>And I feel like yeah it's not anyone else I let down if I don't do it like although it may have an effect on my colleagues or my family if I don't get up in the morning and go to work it's, I know I'm capable of it so it's only letting me down if I don't actually do anything so...</i></p> <p>(E: p 15)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knows that she's quite clever, not silly and not dumb 2. Knows that she's capable of doing it to the best of her ability 3. It's not anyone else but herself she lets down if she doesn't do it <p>Value placed on being clever Emphasis on personal responsibility – internal locus of control</p>
<p>Interviewer asks about family</p> <p><i>They're just very supportive and I think that's the best well quality that they have really because they've never said that... I said to my mom that erm I was thinking about not staying on after the two years and maybe trying something different and she was like 'that's completely up to you'. She just said that her advice would be to stay on because it is erm like a really good job to have but she said she'd support me in whatever I do and I think just having the support and knowing that like no matter what I chose to do I'm gonna have someone behind me to help me that's, probably the best thing yeah.</i></p> <p>(E: p 15)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family very supportive 2. Having someone behind her is probably the best thing 3. Mom supportive of specific job 4. Mom willing to support in whatever E does. <p>These are recurring comments</p>

Data extract	Coded for: (comments in bold are my reflections on what E has said)
<p>Interviewer refers to people at work being supportive – she agrees <i>Yeah and my friends as well. The minute my friend, well my best friend's just got a job as well so now that we've both got money coming in there's a lot of things that we'll be able to together like we wanna go holiday the end of this year.</i> (E: p 15) <i>So it's a though that motivates you to...</i> (E: p 16)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Best friend has a job as well 2. Both got money coming in 3. Able to do more together e.g. go on holiday 4. This is something that motivates her Having money confers freedom and chance to enjoy herself

2g: What's not helping?

<p><i>I think there's a lot of things in the way but I suppose that could just be my age like...on the week, like on Thursdays it's student night so all my friends wanna go up town and go out and then I'm like 'I can't I've got work Friday. Like I've got to be in work for eight o'clock'. And well it's yeah, just things like that and then I suppose just whatever's on your mind really 'cause it always, when you're sitting at your desk at work and you've got five minutes spare it's just you're thinking about it so then yeah...</i> (E: p 16)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Comments there are a lot of things in the way 2. Suggests could be linked with her age 3. Friends want to go out and she has work the next day 4. She has things on her mind 5. She thinks about these things when she has 5 minutes spare at work Sense of frustration, missing out on the usual things teenagers enjoy?
<p>Interviewer asks if there's anything people say that tips her off balance <i>Erm, not really no, I don't think, no I think the one... a bit of knock of confidence sometimes if like, do you know a mistake that you make and you generally don't realise and someone mentions it and you're like ahhhh.</i> (E: p 16) <i>Because you feel like, I mean I know</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interviewee refers to work in her response to this question 2. Confidence is knocked if she makes a mistake and someone mentions it (mentions doing something wrong twice) Sense of insecurity – general and work related? 3. Having to prove themselves because they're young and the employer took a chance in taking

<p><i>the other apprenticeships feel a bit like this as well like, we have more to prove than everyone else 'cause like we're young and we're... They've took a chance by investing in us and like having us here so we've got a bit more to prove so then when we do something wrong it, it does set you back a bit but you just have to...</i> (E: p 17)</p> <p><i>Yeah I think it does play on your mind a bit 'cause knowing that you're well the youngest in the office and then they've took a chance with you and if you mess up then that just looks bad on them and then it's, it is quite a bit of pressure knowing that you've gotta always be at your best because if you make a mistake that's something for them to jump on straight away.</i> (E: p 17)</p> <p><i>I think that we're all aware that we are, I wouldn't say a liability 'cause we're not a liability to the council but...</i> (E: p 17)</p> <p><i>Erm, they have took a risk with taking us and I think [name of boss] was one of the only people in the council that was willing to do it.</i> (E: p 17)</p> <p><i>So just being that, we feel like we, we kind of owe them quite a bit 'cause they've put a lot of work into it and then for us to make a mistake and we wouldn't want it to reflect badly on anyone, especially not ourselves. It's mostly positive...</i> (E: p 17)</p> <p><i>Definitely</i> <i>Overall now's positive!</i> (E: p 18)</p>	<p>them on (mentions three times)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Thinks that other apprentices share these feelings 5. These worries play on her mind 6. Responsibility not to 'mess up' 7. Always got to be at one's best 8. If you make a mistake that's something for them to jump on <p>Feeling of pressure in work Feeling of responsibility in work</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Owing their team a debt 10. Mistakes will reflect on the team and on them 11. It's mostly positive 12. Boss was one of the only people in the council willing to take on apprentices 13. Their team put a lot of work into taking them on 14. Despite her worries, she concludes that things are positive overall <p>Sense of indebtedness/grateful for being given a chance</p>
--	---

Q 3: past experience as NEET (p 18-47)

3h. What led up to this happening?

Data extract	Coded for: (comments in bold are my reflections on what E has said)
<p><i>Erm, I was, I think it was this time two years ago...I'd not long turned sixteen and I had some issues at home. My dad was diagnosed with cancer...and erm was given six months left to live so I...</i> (E: p 18)</p> <p><i>Err I went into school and like spoke to my head teacher and just said would I be able to study from home. So I started studying erm from home like to be with my dad and then after he died I didn't go back to school I just did my exams, I just went in for my exams. And then I had the six weeks off and then I went to college well sixth form at my school for about, September I was, I was there for about a month and a half and then I ended up leaving there and then I was out of college and no work and my mom was getting really frustrated because I did do really well in school, I got like mainly A stars so I...</i> (E: p 18)</p> <p><i>Yeah so I am quite bright erm,</i> (E: p 18)</p> <p><i>And err so when I left college my mom wasn't very pleased at all she said like 'if you can find yourself a job or if you can go back to college then I'll support you again but while you're doing nothing you can do nothing on your own' like as in she was basically saying 'if you choose to do nothing then that's your choice but...it's only you it's affecting'. Basically she didn't want to support me while I was doing nothing. She didn't want to give me money for.....</i> (E: p 18)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Issues at home – dad diagnosed with cancer and given 6 months to live 2. Given permission by school to study from home to spend time with dad 3. After dad died, didn't return to school apart from sitting exams 4. Started college in September, left after a month and a half 5. Out of college and no work 6. Mum getting really frustrated because she did really well in school Mentions being bright (recurring theme) 7. Mum not prepared to support financially her for doing nothing – said she needed to find job or go to college 8. Returned to another college – left after two months 9. Realised college wasn't for her 10. Got job in telesales cold calling – absolutely horrific. Was there for a month or two 11. Then out of work and college for 3,4 months – that was horrible 12. Waking up every day and just nothing to do 13. Like having six week holidays twice over – it wasn't fun 14. At first thought she could do what she wanted 15. Barriers to doing what she wanted – no money and friends

<p><i>not trying so I went back to college. I think I went to [name of school] erm went to their sixth form for a couple of months and then I was like, realised that I didn't, the college thing really wasn't for me. So from there I got a job in telesales, I worked for erm [name of company] in [name of place], that was absolutely horrific. Erm, yeah it was telesales I was just on the phone cold calling...</i></p> <p><i>(E: p 19)</i></p> <p><i>and it was horrible. I think I was there for about a month or two, that was towards like March time.</i></p> <p><i>(E: p 19)</i></p> <p><i>And then, from there what did I do? Then I was out of work, out of college for about three, four months and that was horrible. Just waking, waking up every day and just nothing to do.</i></p> <p><i>(E: p 19)</i></p> <p><i>It was like having I don't know six week holidays like twice all grouped together, it wasn't fun. At first, well at first I was like 'oh yeah I've got nothing to do, I can do what I want all day every day' and then you realise 'oh actually I've got no money, actually all my friends are at college'.</i></p> <p><i>(E: p 19)</i></p> <p><i>So then you've got nothing to do when you're home alone 'til everyone else comes home anyway so erm, that was pretty boring. So then from there I was like well I need to do something like I don't just wanna sit around doing nothing. So I started applying for jobs, I didn't really have any luck, I got offered to go back to [name of company] but I was like 'that's not something I can see myself doing and I don't wanna be doing for the rest of my life'.</i></p> <p><i>(E: p 19)</i></p> <p><i>And so from then I went to do the Prince's Trust course.</i></p> <p><i>(E: p 19)</i></p> <p><i>Yeah. I didn't actually manage to</i></p>	<p>all at college</p> <p>16. Being home alone was pretty boring</p> <p>17. Then decided she needed to do something</p> <p>18. Started applying for jobs, didn't have any luck.</p> <p>19. Offered previous job but didn't see this as being something she'd do for the rest of her life</p> <p>20. Went to do Prince's Trust, didn't complete as got the 12 got the 12 week 'taster' apprenticeship</p> <p>21. Obtained certificates</p> <p>Describes very unsettled time</p> <p>Impact of major emotional trauma on her life</p>
--	---

complete that because it was either I completed that or took this job opportunity.

(E: p 19)

Erm but what I did do is I got my certificates, most of them because I was studying outside of work to try and finish my Prince's Trust course but yeah so I just I was in and out of college, in and out of work.

(E: p 19)

I went to [name] college, the one down the road.

(E: p 21)

I went down there but erm, I think that was a really big decision for me to make as well and, I haven't actually told any of my friends that I ever done that course as well.

(E: p 21)

No 'cause it's got a really bad reputation.

(E: p 21)

Yeah. So it's just, I just didn't really tell anyone what I was doing. Like my family knew and they was really proud of me for doing it and I really enjoyed it I think it was one of the best things I done.....yeah.

(E: p 21)

It's a lot about, it's basic knowledge which I already had but it's a lot of confidence building and...

...yeah I mean it teaches you a lot about jobs and how to go into an interview and how to...

Which is a lot of information that's really just necessary to have but you don't really get taught.

(E: p 21)

*Interviewer comments about 'soft' skills such as presenting yourself
Yeah sort of that you're expected to have but are never really taught so...
I think that was something that I definitely do, well it definitely helped*

22. Didn't tell friends about Prince's Trust course as it has a bad reputation

23. Only family knew

24. Family really proud of her

25. She really enjoyed Prince's Trust course and thought it was one of the best things she did

26. Basic knowledge she already had but also confidence building, teaches a lot about going into jobs, interviews – necessary information that you don't get taught

Sense of shame – concern about how she would look to her friends?

School doesn't prepare people for working life?

Reputation of some organisations there to support people is poor amongst young people?

27. Doesn't think she would have got her current job without the Prince's Trust course

28. Prince's trust tutor was very involved in helping her to get the job and supportive of her

29. Prince's trust – one of those

<p><i>me yeah because I without that I don't think I would have actually got this job, well I don't think I would have.</i> (E: p 22)</p> <p><i>It was erm, my tutor for the Prince's Trust, [name] she was very erm yeah she was very involved in helping me get this job, she was very supportive of me.</i> (E: p 22)</p> <p><i>And did like that yeah. But I think Prince's Trust was probably was a really good thing to do 'cause it's one of them once in a lifetime things really and, yeah it really helped. It was definitely a positive experience and I think that was just the thing that I needed just to put me back into gear and just I thought...</i> (E: p 22)</p> <p><i>I can't remember. I think it was, I think it was a twelve week course.</i> (E: p 22)</p>	<p>once in a lifetime things, definitely a positive experience and just what she needed to put her back into gear</p> <p>Sense of a pivotal moment or turning point?</p> <p>Emphasis on 'soft skills'</p>
--	---

Appendix 7: List of 55 basic codes derived from the interviews

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sense of personal efficacy 2. Attributions about life events 3. Future orientated 4. Possibility of progression 5. Opportunities 6. Optimism 7. Goals and drive to do better 8. Being 'given a chance' or 'another chance' 9. Indebtedness – feeling grateful but responsible 10. Perceptions of own ability 11. Satisfaction with progress 12. Sense of achievement 13. Ambivalence about choices made 14. Attitude to independence 15. Adverse life events 16. Feeling low/personal fragility 17. Insecurity/security 18. Response to rejection 19. Regret about what 'might have been' 20. Worry/anxiety 21. Frustration 22. Difficult experiences as 'growth points' 23. Sense of personal 'turning points' e.g. leaving school 24. Desire not to return to the past 25. Coping strategies 26. Attitudes towards psychological support e.g. counselling 27. Degree of 'fit' with young person's hopes and aspirations 28. Value placed on 'being occupied' 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 29. Value placed on education/learning 30. Opportunities through training 31. Difficulties with learning 32. Perceptions of school experience 33. Perceptions of current work 34. Value placed on a 'good job' 35. Desire to work 36. Prestige attached to job 37. Value placed on a career 38. Value placed on earnings 39. Attitudes towards benefits 40. Extent of commitment to current pathway 41. Perceptions about opportunities for young people 42. Perception of gaps in what is provided 43. Society's views of 'young people' e.g. single parents, teenagers 44. Value placed on broader range of experiences/people 45. Family relationships/significant others 46. Seeing family support in a new light 47. Influential role models 48. Being a role model for others 49. Importance of other people believing in the young person 50. Influence of peers 51. Value placed on peer support 52. Need to be with other young people 53. Influence of other adults 54. Hindsight 55. Confidence
--	--

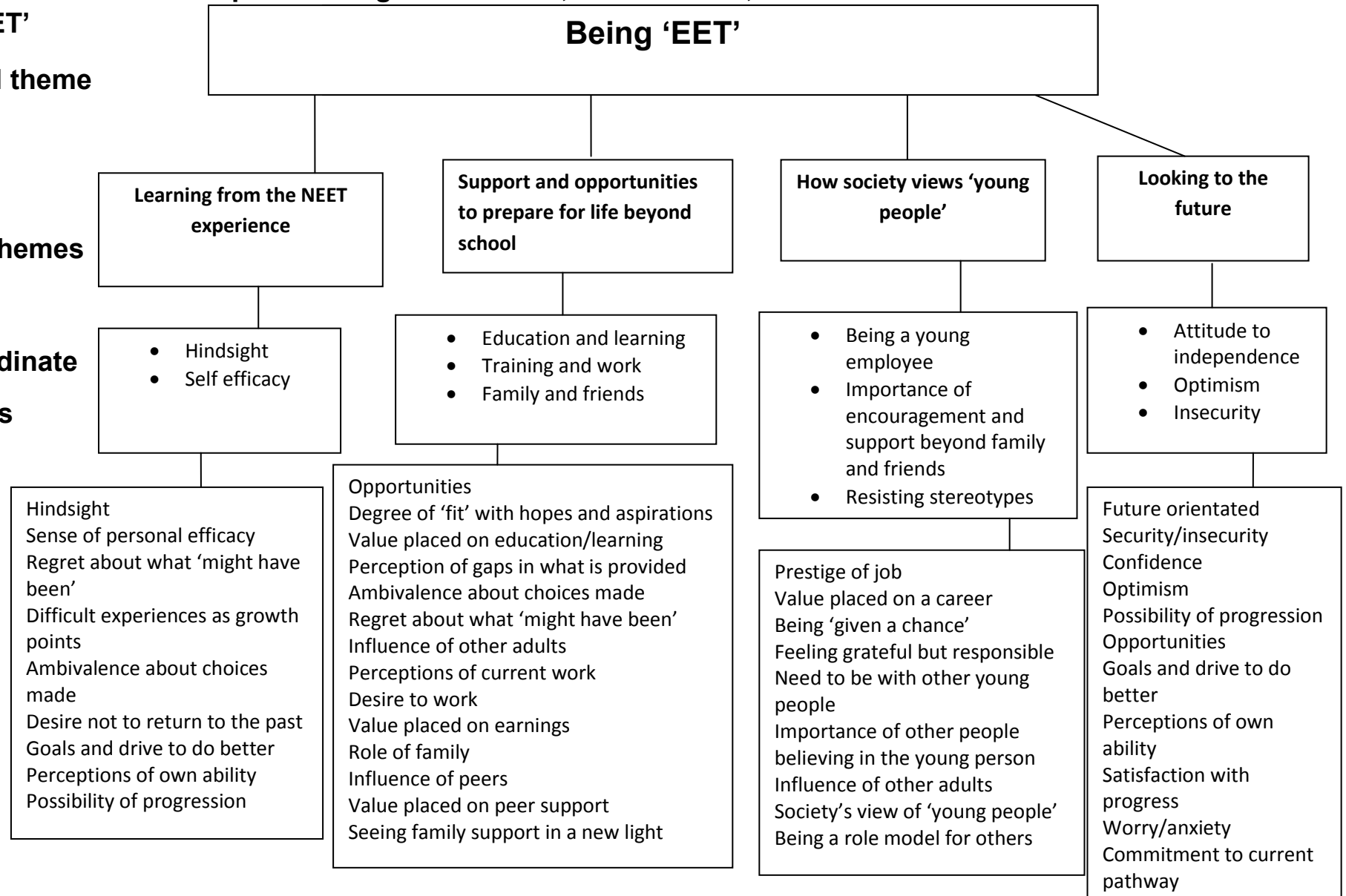
Appendix 8: Relationship between global themes, main themes, subordinate themes and basic codes for 'EET'

Global theme

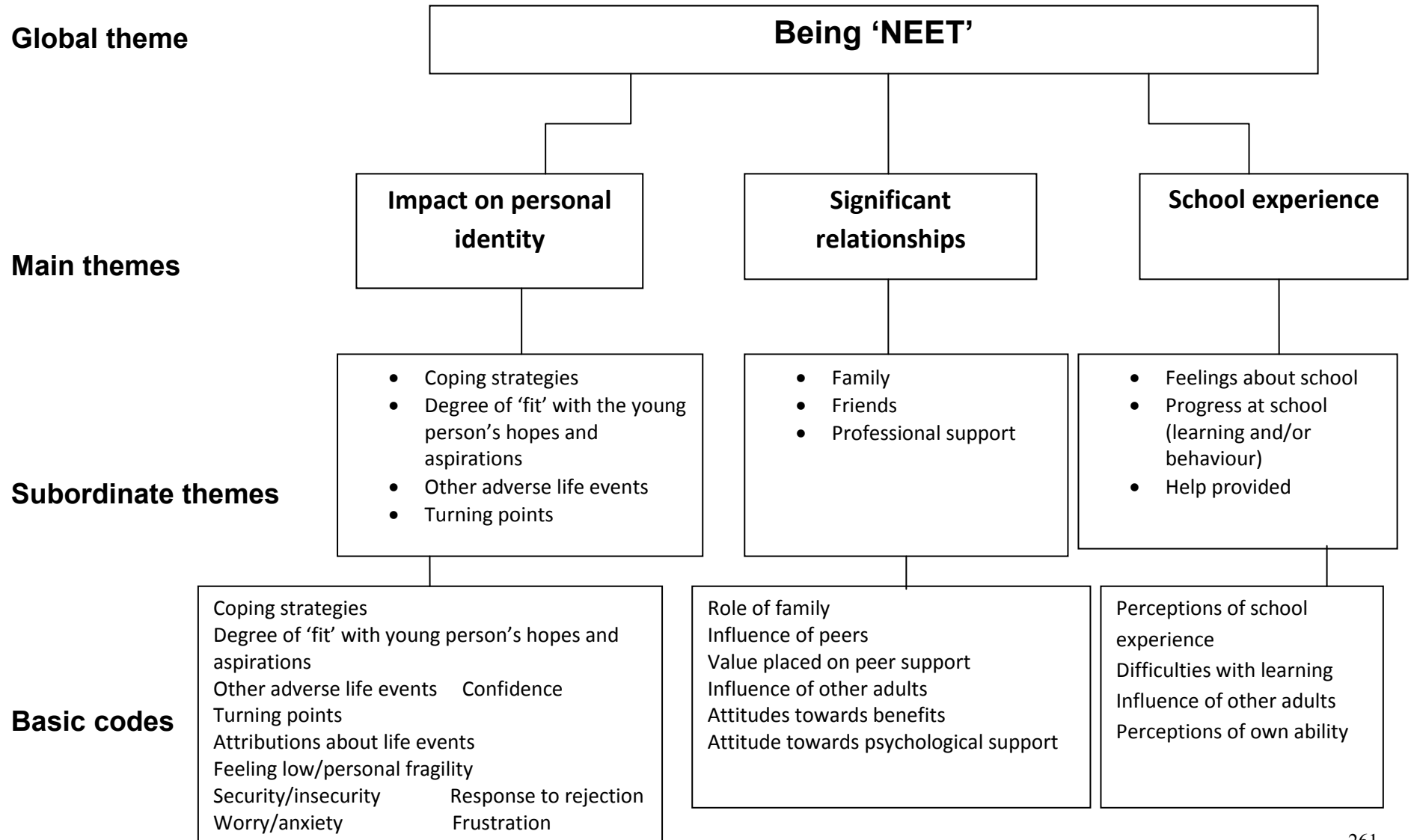
Main themes

Subordinate themes

Basic codes



Appendix 9: relationship between global themes, main themes, subordinate themes and basic codes for 'NEET'



Appendix 10: Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the responses to how the young people felt ‘then’ at the time they were NEET and how they feel now

One of the interview questions specifically asked the young people to sort twenty ‘thoughts and feelings’ cards to reflect their perspective at the time (how they felt ‘then’ at the time they were NEET). They were then asked to elaborate on their reasons for sorting the cards in the way they had. The qualitative and quantitative information from this process clearly shows that NEET status is associated with extremely few positive feelings for the respondents, and in most cases with a high number of negative feelings. In this appendix, a comparison is made between the young peoples’ responses to this interview question, and to the corresponding question asking them about their feelings since moving into education, employment or training.

The analysis was conducted according to the following steps:

1. I divided the words into ‘**positive**’ words and ‘**negative**’ words as shown below (10 of each).

Positive words	Negative words
Relieved	Stressed
Relaxed	Sad
Happy	Worried
Proud	Angry
Excited	Frustrated
Hopeful	Disappointed
Motivated	Gloomy
Confident	Pessimistic
Optimistic	Fed up
Calm	Bored

2. To simplify the analysis, I grouped the 5 choices of the extent to which they had the feelings, into 3 choices: Never/rarely; Sometimes; and Often/Almost always.
3. The patterns of responses made by each young person are set out at the end. The 'overall rating' refers to the questions which asked the young person to summarise how s/he was feeling in general, using a Likert rating scale where 0 is 'very bad/negative', 1 is 'quite bad/negative', 3 is 'neither bad nor good/neutral', 4 is 'quite good/positive' and 5 is 'very good/positive'. Therefore the higher the number, the more positive the young person was feeling.

Very bad Quite bad Neither good nor bad Quite good Very good

4. Analysis of the pattern of positive and negative feelings selected by each individual about being NEET compared with their current situation showed a clear trend for negative feelings to outweigh positive feelings about NEET, and in most cases the responses were polarised to either end of the Likert scale, suggesting that the feelings were strongly held. All of the respondents chose more negative than positive feelings in the 'often/always' column for their time as NEET. Seven out of nine respondents reported having no frequent positive feelings (often/always) during this time, and frequent negative feelings. Eight out of the nine respondents placed 80% or more of the 'positive' words in the 'never/rarely' category for their time as NEET.

The frequency of negative feelings mentioned as being 'often' or 'almost always' experienced, in rank order, were: 'stressed' = eight; 'fed up' = eight; 'bored' = eight; 'worried' = seven; 'sad' = six; 'disappointed' = five; 'angry' = four; 'frustrated' = four; 'gloomy' = four; and 'pessimistic' = four. A few respondents suggested other negative feelings they experienced – 'lonely', 'isolated' and 'depressed' were suggested by D; 'confused' by E; 'embarrassed' and 'depressed' by F; and 'nervous' by I.

5. In comparison, the reverse was true for EET, that is, positive feelings outweighed negative feelings in most cases. However the pattern here was less polarised, probably reflecting a greater degree of ambivalence in some respondents about their current circumstances. Respondents appeared to be more selective in their choice of feelings; for example, picking out boredom or feeling stressed in relation to their current work/training, or frustrated/worried if they thought that they hadn't achieved their goals yet. Five of the nine interviewees did not report any negative feelings at all in the often/always category; one reported a single negative feeling; and three respondents (D, E, and F) reported often/always having a mixture of positive and negative feelings.

INTERVIEWEE A

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Excited Worried Stressed Gloomy Disappointed Angry Optimistic Pessimistic Confident Relieved Calm Sad	Frustrated Fed up Proud	Relaxed Hopeful Motivated Bored Happy	Confident Disappointed Worried Pessimistic Calm Relieved Sad Motivated Happy Gloomy Excited Angry Proud Optimistic	Relaxed	Worried Frustrated Bored Stressed Fed up
Overall rating = 4.5			Overall rating = 2.5		

INTERVIEWEE B

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Stressed Sad Worried Angry Frustrated	Calm	Relaxed Motivated Hopeful Happy Excited	Relieved Relaxed Happy Excited Proud		Sad Gloomy Stressed Frustrated Disappointed

Disappointed Gloomy Optimistic Fed up Bored Pessimistic Overall rating = 5	Relieved Proud Confident	Hopeful Motivated Confident Optimistic Calm Worried Bored Pessimistic Overall rating = 1	Angry Fed up
--	--------------------------------	--	-----------------

INTERVIEWEE C

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Stressed Sad Worried Angry Frustrated Disappointed Relaxed Excited Hopeful Gloomy Optimistic Calm Fed up Pessimistic Overall rating = 4	Proud Motivated Bored	Happy Relieved Confident	Calm Optimistic Hopeful Excited Proud Happy Motivated Confident Relaxed Overall rating = 1	Relieved	Worried Bored Disappointed Sad Pessimistic Stressed Angry Frustrated Fed up Gloomy

INTERVIEWEE D

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Pessimistic Relieved Calm Proud Confident Excited	Gloomy Happy Relaxed Stressed Bored Disappointed Sad Angry	Fed up Motivated Optimistic Frustrated Hopeful Worried	Relieved Relaxed Excited Proud Motivated Confident Optimistic Calm Pessimistic	Happy Hopeful	Bored Sad Stressed Worried Frustrated Disappointed Fed up Gloomy Angry <i>Lonely*</i> <i>Isolated*</i> <i>Depressed*</i>
Overall rating = 4			Overall rating = 2		
			<i>*Words suggested by interviewee</i>		

INTERVIEWEE E

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Pessimistic Frustrated Gloomy Bored Calm Relaxed	Fed up Motivated Relieved Confident Disappointed Proud	Stressed Optimistic Excited Happy Sad Hopeful	Relaxed Stressed Happy Excited Proud Calm Confident	Pessimistic Gloomy Hopeful Angry Disappointed Frustrated	Sad Bored Optimistic Fed up Worried <i>*Confused</i>

Angry	Worried	Motivated Relieved
Overall rating = 3.8		Overall rating = 1.5

INTERVIEWEE F

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Confident Gloomy Optimistic	Sad Disappointed Relieved Proud Calm Angry	Bored Relaxed Stressed Motivated Frustrated Pessimistic Hopeful Fed up Happy Excited Worried	Proud Hopeful Relaxed Motivated Confident Happy Excited Calm Relieved Optimistic	Gloomy	Stressed Bored Disappointed Pessimistic Fed up Frustrated Worried Angry Sad <i>*Embarrassed</i> <i>*Depressed</i>
Overall rating = 5			Overall rating = 1		

INTERVIEWEE G

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Disappointed Pessimistic Gloomy Angry Frustrated Sad Worried Bored	Fed up Stressed Relieved Hopeful Excited	Motivated Proud Relaxed Calm Optimistic Confident Happy	Proud Relieved Calm Optimistic Confident Happy Excited Motivated	Hopeful Frustrated Relaxed Angry	Bored Gloomy Stressed Disappointed Fed up Sad Pessimistic Worried
Overall rating = 4.4			Overall rating = 2		

INTERVIEWEE H

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Angry Gloomy Sad Disappointed Frustrated Pessimistic Worried	Bored Fed up Stressed Hopeful Confident Excited	Motivated Happy Relieved Relaxed Optimistic Calm Proud	Excited Motivated Relieved Relaxed Confident Calm Hopeful Optimistic Happy	Proud Angry Sad Worried Frustrated Disappointed Gloomy	Stressed Pessimistic Fed up Bored
Overall rating = 4			Overall rating = 2		

INTERVIEWEE I

'NOW'			'THEN'		
Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Almost always
Pessimistic Gloomy Fed up Bored Sad Angry	Hopeful Confident Stressed Worried Proud Disappointed Frustrated Relieved	Calm Optimistic Excited Relaxed Happy Motivated	Pessimistic Gloomy Relieved Proud Sad Angry Confident Hopeful	Excited Motivated Frustrated Calm Relaxed Fed up Disappointed	Stressed Happy Worried Optimistic Bored <i>*Nervous</i>
Overall rating = 4			Overall rating = 3		