

***Doctorate in Professional Educational,
Child and Adolescent Psychology***



Institute of Education

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**Doctorate in Professional Educational Child and Adolescent
Psychology**

Doctoral Thesis

***‘Sometimes you have to work hard despite
the system’: Exploring the role and
experiences of designated teachers for
looked after and previously looked after
children.***

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Declaration

I, Lauren Boesley, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

In line with guidance, the word count includes any footnotes, endnotes, glossary, maps, diagrams, and tables, but excludes the appendices and list of references, as well as the title page, declaration, abstract, impact statement, acknowledgements, contents page and lists of tables and figures.

Abstract

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017) placed statutory duties on all state-maintained schools in England to allocate a designated teacher responsible for promoting the educational achievement of care-experienced children in schools. Despite their integral role, there is little research exploring how designated teachers perceive, experience and enact their role. The current research aimed to explore the relationship between statutory regulations about the designated teacher role and practice. This included an exploration of key roles and responsibilities, barriers and facilitating factors that impact the role, perceptions around personal effectiveness, and an exploration into how designated teachers work with virtual schools, social care, educational psychologists (EPs) and wider professionals. This mixed-methods study used surveys with a sample of virtual schools (n=44) and designated teachers (n=142), and semi-structured interviews with designated teachers (n=16). Quantitative data were analysed using a statistical analysis programme, providing descriptive statistics and exploring trends, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Survey findings provided an exploration into support from virtual schools, EPs, and wider agencies; key challenges faced by designated teachers; time spent enacting key duties; designated teacher's sense of effectiveness; and multiagency working. Thematic analysis from interviews elicited three themes: complexities of the designated teacher role; building relationships and making contacts; and negotiating challenges in the wider system. Implications include raising the profile of designated teachers by increasing awareness and recognition about the role in schools and among professionals, including social care and EPs. It is hoped that by supporting and strengthening the designated teacher role, holistic outcomes for care-experienced children can be improved.

Impact Statement

This research aimed to increase awareness and understanding about the designated teacher role in England. Findings have contributed to the growing body of literature on designated teachers and outcomes for care-experienced children. By gathering views from a national sample of designated teachers and virtual schools, this research investigated how statutory recommendations about the designated teacher role related to practice, as well as barriers and facilitating factors that impact the role, perceptions around designated teachers' sense of personal effectiveness, and experiences working with other professionals including virtual schools, social workers, and educational psychologists (EPs). By gaining insight into designated teachers views, this research hopes to inform future policy development and identify systems and processes that may be used to advance and support the designated teacher role in England.

Findings have contributed to both the academic literature, and professional practice for designated teachers, virtual schools, EPs, local authorities (LAs), and wider policy makers. The research holds several implications for stakeholders, and covers the following key areas:

- To raise the profile of care-experienced children, more needs to be done to raise the profile of designated teachers. This involves increasing awareness and recognition about the designated teacher role more widely. Designated teachers need to be supported by senior leaders to enact change effectively, and the role would benefit from being considered a senior position, rather than an add-on responsibility, to increase the role's influence.

- Designated teachers raised concerns about time and workload pressures, and there needs to be greater recognition about the time needed to effectively enact the role. A fixed amount of time might not always be feasible or appropriate, but set time should be considered in relation to the number of care-experienced children, and the individual needs of children and designated teachers.
- To be effective advocates for care-experienced children, designated teachers need the knowledge, skills, and emotional support to enact duties confidently. Decisions around assigning the role should be considered carefully by governing bodies and in consultation with prospective designated teachers, to ensure individuals are aware of expectations. Virtual schools, in collaboration with EPs, are encouraged to provide greater access to supervision and online training/networking opportunities to enable designated teachers to attend flexibly, share experiences and develop their understanding of the role.
- Designated teachers found it challenging to identify previously looked after children and expressed uncertainty about these statutory expectations. It is important that these children receive the support they are eligible for; it may be useful for virtual schools and LAs to provide more support around developing centralised systems for monitoring previously looked after children, rather than placing the onus on designated teachers alone.
- Finally, virtual schools, LAs and policy makers should consider a nationwide consultation with designated teachers to address the bureaucratic challenges caused by a lack of consistency and standardisation in paperwork, process and procedure between counties. Consultation should also address the role expectation discrepancies, which could be mitigated by greater access to joint training between designated teachers, social workers and wider professionals.

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Glossary of Terms

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CLA	Child Looked After / Looked After Child
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
DT	Designated Teacher
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
LA	Local Authority
NAVSH	National Association of Virtual School Heads
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PEP	Personal Educational Plan
PP+	Pupil Premium Plus
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
VSH	Virtual School Headteacher

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Overview

This research explores the role of designated teachers (DTs) for looked after and previously looked after children in England. Within this, role, identity, and status of DTs will be explored, including the development of the role alongside recommendations within national policy. This study hopes to gain a greater understanding of the DT role from the perspectives of those who experience and enact it, including key responsibilities, barriers and facilitating factors that impact the role, and perceptions around personal effectiveness. Additionally, this study will explore how DTs work alongside other professionals, particularly the virtual school, social care and educational psychologists (EPs). Findings from the research hope to inform policy and identify systems and processes required to advance and support DTs.

This chapter introduces and defines key terminology and outlines the current context for children in care, statutory support and the rationale for the research.

1.2. Defining Terminology

Children who have been placed in the care of their local authority (LA) are referred to as being 'looked after' by the LA. The Children Act 1989 outlined three categories in which a child may be considered to be looked after:

- if they are provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours;
- if they are subject to a care order;
- if they are subject to a placement order.

When a child becomes looked after, the LA becomes the 'corporate parent' and is legally and morally responsible to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their care. Guidance on corporate parenting suggests that LA professionals should be guided by the question, 'would this be good enough for my child?' when making decisions about the welfare of children in care (Department for Education (DfE), 2018a). This includes a specific duty on LAs to promote the educational achievement of children in care (Children Act, 2004). Following amendments to the Children and Social Work Act 2017, LA's duties were extended to support the education of previously looked after children. A previously looked after child is defined as a child who has left LA care through either an Adoption Order, a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or a Child Arrangements Order.

Throughout policy and research, the terms Looked after Children (LAC), Children in Care (CIC) and Children Looked After (CLA) have been used interchangeably. Although 'Looked After Child' is currently used within government policy, advocates within the care community have raised concerns that the acronym 'LAC' can create the impression that children are 'lacking' in something. In contrast, the term 'care-experienced' has been introduced by the Scottish government to describe any child that has been in care, is currently in care, or is from a looked-after background. Therefore, within this thesis, the acronym CLA and term 'care-experienced' will be used, unless making specific reference to previously looked after children. However, it must be emphasised that care-experienced children are not a homogenous group, but individuals with different backgrounds, experiences, and needs.

1.3. Current Context for Care-Experienced Children

In England, national data shows a year-on-year increase in the total number of CLA. At 31 March 2020, most recent figures recorded approximately 80,080 CLA, an increase of 2% since 2019 (DfE, 2020a). Children may enter care for numerous reasons, including family dysfunction or acute family stress, absent parenting, parental illness or child disability; however, the most common reason, representing almost two-thirds of cases (65%), is risk of abuse or neglect (DfE, 2020a). These pre-care experiences can have a significant psychological, emotional and educational impact on children; CLA have been identified as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, demonstrating consistently poorer outcomes than peers across academic, physical and mental health, wellbeing, and future outcomes (Cameron & Maginn, 2009; Jackson, 2013).

Although CLA are reported to cover a full range of cognitive ability (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Jackson & Sachdev, 2001), they demonstrate consistently poorer academic outcomes than the general population. Care-experienced children are reportedly five times more likely to be excluded from school and many leave education without formal qualifications, putting them at greater risk of experiencing poverty, reduced income, unemployment, homelessness and offending (DfE, 2020b; Driscoll, 2018; Goddard, 2000; Harker et al., 2003; McDonagh, 2011; National Audit Office & DfE, 2015; The Centre for Social Justice, 2015).

In comparison to children who are not in care, attainment for CLA is much lower. In 2019, only 37% of CLA at Key Stage 2 reached expected standards for reading, writing and maths, compared to 65% for all other children; furthermore, the average Attainment 8 score for CLA at Key Stage 4 was 19.1 compared to 44.6 for all other

children, and the percentage of CLA achieving the threshold in English and maths at Grade 5 or above was 7.2%, compared to 40.1% for all other children (DfE, 2020b). Moreover, CLA are four times more likely to have a special educational need (SEN) than peers, and nine times more likely to have an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) (DfE, 2020b). Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs are the most common primary type of SEN for CLA, representing 40.4% of those with EHC plans and 47.5% with SEN support; this is three times that of the child population as a whole (representing 13.3% with EHCPs and 18.1% with SEN support) (DfE, 2020b).

1.4. Factors Impacting Academic Outcomes

Explaining the underachievement of CLA is complex. Studies have identified several factors that can lead to poor academic achievement for CLA, including low attendance, high exclusion rates, placement instability and multiple school changes (Berridge, 2007; Cameron et al., 2015; Harker et al., 2003). Some researchers suggest that the lasting psychological and emotional impact of pre-care experiences can explain these factors, as research has consistently indicated a strong correlation between wellbeing and attainment (Cameron et al., 2015; Jackson, 2013; Riglin et al., 2013). In addition, systemic failures in the care and education systems have been suggested as an alternative explanation for the underachievement of CLA (Fletcher-Campbell & Hall, 1990; Jackson, 1987). Systemic factors include inadequate collaboration between education and care services, failure to prioritise education, low expectations, placement instability and disrupted schooling (Harker et al., 2004). Berridge (2012) argued that historically, the educational needs of CLA have not been adequately prioritised by professionals across education and care, contributing to widening disparities between CLA and their peers, and calling for changes to the system to support this vulnerable group.

1.5. Statutory Support for Care-Experienced Children

The Virtual School

The Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children Act 2004 and Children and Families Act 2014) placed a legal duty on LAs within England to safeguard and promote the welfare of care-experienced children. This included a specific duty to promote the educational achievement of CLA by appointing at least one person to oversee that these duties were met. In 2007, the government introduced the concept of the virtual school and virtual school headteacher (VSH), to champion the education of all CLA within their authorities (Department for Education and Skills (DFES), 2007). The virtual school was not intended to be a physical school, but represented a service within the LA. The VSH was established to lead the service and coordinate educational support for CLA by working collaboratively with education settings to monitor their attendance, progress, and attainment. By 2010, virtual schools were widely established in LAs throughout England, and the subsequent Children and Families Act 2014 placed a statutory responsibility on all LAs to appoint a VSH to monitor progress and work with key partners to prioritise CLA's achievement.

Designated Teachers

In addition to the virtual school initiative, the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017) placed a statutory duty on all state-maintained schools to allocate a DT, responsible for promoting the educational achievement of care-experienced children in schools. Statutory guidance (published 2009 and updated 2018) outlined that DTs should act as the central point of contact in schools for parents/carers, social workers and virtual schools, and have lead responsibility for ensuring that school staff understand the social-emotional and

learning needs of care-experienced children (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009; DfE, 2018c). Ultimately, DTs should act as a champion for care-experienced children; promoting a culture of high aspirations and expectations for learning, ensuring that children's voices are heard, promoting good home-school links and leading on the development and implementation of children's Personal Education Plans.

Personal Education Plans

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were introduced to help increase awareness about the education of CLA (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) & Department of Health (DoH), 2000). All CLA are required to have a PEP, which forms part of their overall care plan, however previously looked after children are not required to have one (DfE, 2018b). Children's PEPs must be initiated by social care within 10 days of the child becoming looked after, and the first PEP meeting must take place in time for the first care review (20 working days after the child has been placed into care). The PEP acts as a record for children's education and progress; they are used to identify strengths, needs, outcomes and objectives that will enable the child to progress academically and support their emotional development (DfE, 2018c). In school, DTs are responsible for leading on PEPs in partnership with key stakeholders, including school staff, parents/carers, social workers and virtual schools, acting as a 'collective memory' about the education of CLA (DfE, 2018c, p.15). All DTs must work closely with staff to monitor and evaluate children's progress, and PEPs must be reviewed regularly; at six weeks after a child becomes looked after, at three months, then at six month intervals (DfE, 2018c).

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)

Since 2014, all care-experienced children have been eligible for PP+ funding to support attainment (DfE, 2018c). For CLA, funding is directly managed by the virtual school to ensure that it is being used to support their educational achievement. Each virtual school has their own set of processes and procedures for distributing funding to schools; they can pass on the full amount (currently £2300 per child each year), or pass on a partial amount depending on what schools have applied for (DfE, 2015). During PEP meetings, stakeholders must collaboratively agree how to use the funding effectively, and PEP documentation must outline how the funding will help meet children's targets and outcomes (DfE, 2018c). Funding can be used on a range of provision, support or intervention that will ultimately benefit the attainment of CLA. For care-experienced children (who are no longer in care), funding is managed directly by the school, allowing greater flexibility about how it is used.

1.6. Rationale

Despite holding a lead responsibility for promoting outcomes for care-experienced children, there is a dearth of research exploring how DTs perceive, experience, and enact their role. My personal interest in this area developed from a small-scale research project undertaken in 2018/2019. The project began to explore the role and experiences of DTs who were involved in a mentoring intervention for CLA through a Knowledge Exchange Programme known as PALAC (Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children). During this project, I was struck by how complex and time-intensive the DT role was, as well as by the personal passion held by participants for supporting care-experienced children in their schools. Key findings identified that the six DTs interviewed did not always see a distinction between their DT duties and additional roles. This apparent lack of clear distinctiveness could

sometimes create feelings of uncertainty around role boundaries and influence their sense of effectiveness. Findings shed light on DTs' perceptions and reflections on their position within the education and care systems, emphasising the need for greater role clarity and support for DTs (see *Appendix A* for a summary of findings from this project).

Following this project, I was curious to know whether more DTs from other parts of the country felt similarly about their role and challenges faced; this led to the development of the current research. By building on the initial, small-scale project, the current research aims to explore the views and experiences of a larger sample of designated teachers from across the country and explore the relationship between statutory regulations and recommendations about the role and DT practice. This includes an exploration of key roles and responsibilities, barriers and facilitating factors that impact the role, and perceptions around personal effectiveness. Additionally, this research aims to understand how DTs work with other professionals, including the virtual school, social care, and EPs, to support outcomes for care-experienced children. By gaining greater insight into DTs' views and experiences, this research hopes to inform policy and identify systems and processes that may advance and support DTs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Overview

This review aims to evaluate existing literature on the role of the virtual school and DTs. It first describes the historical context, including key policies and legislative frameworks that influenced the development of the virtual school and DT role, followed by an evaluation of current research. See *Appendix B* for the search strategy.

2.2. Historical Context and Early Policy Development

Since the mid-1960s, research has identified CLA as a particularly disadvantaged group, however early concerns about their underachievement received little attention from policy makers and practitioners at the time (see Ferguson, 1966; Pringle, 1965; and Essen et al. 1976 as cited in Harker et al., 2004). During this period, CLA's underachievement was largely attributed to socio-economically deprived backgrounds, and researchers appeared reluctant to associate low attainment with the care system itself (Harker et al., 2004). In the early 1980s, research on outcomes for young people leaving care revealed that very few left education with qualifications, academic expectations were low, and educational achievement was a minor consideration within care arrangements (see Millham, et al., 1980; and Stein & Carey, 1986 as cited in Rivers, 2018). At this point, an alternative explanation for the underachievement of CLA was proposed, namely that poor academic achievement was caused by the care system's failure to meet and prioritise CLA's educational needs (Jackson, 1987). Key factors included inadequate collaboration between education and care services, low expectations, placement instability and disrupted schooling (Harker et al., 2004). This paved the way for a renewed focus on supporting outcomes for CLA within both research and national policy (Jackson, 1987).

In 1989, the Children Act came into force, bringing significant legal changes regarding children and families, and establishing the legislative framework for the current child protection system in England and Wales. The 1989 Act aimed to give children a voice by keeping them, and their wellbeing, at the centre of all decision-making, and gave LAs a particular duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of CLA (section 22). In 1990, the first national study evaluating existing education arrangements for CLA was published (Fletcher-Campbell & Hall, 1990). The report highlighted that CLA were disproportionately disadvantaged by failures in the system and called for greater liaison and collaboration between education and social care services. In response to growing awareness about the educational difficulties experienced by CLA, the government published the Circular 13/94 (DfEE, 1994) that recognised the positive impact that school and educational achievement can have on outcomes for CLA. In an attempt to encourage coordination and appropriate information sharing between education and care, the Circular recommended that headteachers should 'hold a watching brief for all children being looked after', however no formal requirement was enforced (DfEE & DoH, 2000; p.31).

Following a joint report from the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (1995), and a government commissioned review by Utting (1997), attention was redrawn to the poor educational outcomes for CLA, highlighting a detrimental lack of communication and coordination between education and care systems. The SSI/Ofsted report (1995) suggested that the educational achievement of CLA was not prioritised because key practitioners from education and social care had not yet established clear roles and responsibilities around the education of CLA. To remedy the issue, the report recommended that schools appoint a named person responsible for CLA – a position that would later develop into the

more formalised DT role. Utting (1997) described the underachievement of CLA as a failure to ensure their welfare under the Children Act 1989, and called for government agencies and LAs to take immediate action to redress these issues. Despite increasing awareness among researchers and policy makers about the educational underachievement of this group, by the late-1990s there was little evidence that education and care services had been able to implement change effectively.

2.3. Making Education a Priority: Key Initiatives

When the New Labour Government came into power (1997-2010), a range of policies were initiated in an attempt to improve outcomes for CLA, combat social exclusion and narrow attainment gaps between social classes (Berridge, 2012). Key initiatives are outlined below.

The 1998 “Quality Protects” Framework and Corporate Parenting

In 1998, the *Quality Protects* programme was introduced to support LAs in transforming the management and delivery of services for CLA and increase educational achievement (DoH, 1998). The *Quality Protects* agenda was seen as a progressive initiative that openly recognised the impact of educational achievement on future outcomes for CLA. The framework introduced national data collection and set specific education targets for LAs to monitor, track and report rates of attainment, attendance, and exclusion. The *Quality Protects* framework also introduced the concept of ‘corporate parenting’ that placed a legal and moral duty on LAs to treat CLA as if they were their own children. Corporate parenting called for all services to take joint responsibility for promoting the wellbeing and achievement of CLA, emphasising the need for collaborative partnership between education, health, and care services.

The 2000 Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care and the Introduction of the DT Role

As part of the *Quality Protects* programme, the government published *Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care* to assist LAs in promoting education outcomes for CLA (DfEE & DoH, 2000). The guidance outlined six education principles to support LAs in meeting their duties as corporate parents: prioritising education; having high expectations and raising standards; promoting inclusion and challenging negative attitudes; achieving continuity and stability; providing early intervention; and listening to the voices of CLA (Hibbert, 2001). To facilitate coordination and cooperation between services, the guidance recommended that LAs should appoint 'a skilled senior officer with a clear remit to establish and enforce joint procedures and protocols and provide a permanent resource for all involved in corporate parenting: *a champion for young people in public care*' (DfEE & DoH, 2000, p. 23). This role would later become the more formalised VSH.

A further initiative included the widespread introduction of DTs (DfEE & DoH, 2000). The guidance formally recommended that all schools appoint a DT to oversee CLA in schools to play a critical role in 'making joint working a reality' and facilitate the timely transfer of information between services (p. 32). The DT was also required to ensure that all CLA had a PEP to establish clear education targets and aspirations, record progress, and ensure access to services and support. The guidance suggested that DTs should hold a senior position in schools to effectively advocate for CLA, and act as a resource for parents/carers, teachers, and children. Local authorities were tasked with implementing these recommendations and providing appropriate training and networking opportunities for DTs to share experiences and promote best practice.

The 2004 Children Act and the Duty to Promote Educational Achievement

In 2004, the formal delivery of Children's Services was brought into focus following the death of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié at the hands of her legal guardians, provoking a formal inquiry and nationwide debate around the need for more integrated services (Laming, 2003). In response, the Children Act 1989 was amended to reinforce that services had a joint responsibility to safeguard children, and LAs were required to appoint a Director of Children's Services to coordinate service delivery (Children Act, 2004). Regarding education, the Children Act 2004 placed a new duty on LAs to promote children's educational achievement. Statutory guidance specified that LAs, as corporate parents for CLA, should 'demonstrate the strongest commitment to helping every child they look after, wherever the child is placed, to achieve the highest educational standards he or she possibly can. This includes supporting their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education' (DfES, 2005, p.4).

The 2007 Care Matters White Paper and the Development of the Virtual School

In 2007, the government proposed a range of reforms to the care system in the *Care Matters* White Paper, including piloting the role of the VSH in 11 LAs (DfES, 2007). These VSHs were tasked with overseeing and improving educational outcomes for CLA by raising attainment, reducing absences, managing exclusions, and ensuring appropriate provision. Ultimately, VSHs were required to champion the educational needs of CLA, promote best practice, and improve coordinated working between education and social care services.

Evidence of the benefit of VSHs originated from findings by Harker et al. (2004), who evaluated a project that aimed to support three LAs in deploying a range of good

practice tools, techniques and policies to improve educational achievement of CLA. Evaluation over a three-year period saw improvements in the education of CLA across quantitative curriculum data, psychological assessment of children's wellbeing and resiliency, interviews with key stakeholders (including LA staff, social workers, carers and DTs) and self-reports from over 50 CLA. A major aim of the project was to promote a whole-authority, corporate parenting approach to the education of CLA; Harker et al. (2004) concluded that this was achieved by appointing a Project Lead Officer, providing evidence for the need and value of a senior champion (i.e. VSH) within the LA to coordinate the education of CLA.

Evaluation of the VSH Pilot. Following the virtual school pilot (DfES, 2007), the government commissioned Berridge et al. (2009) to evaluate the project's impact to inform future policy development. Data was collected using statistical analysis of attainment data, interviews with VSHs, directors of children's services and social workers, and surveys of CLA, carers, social workers, and DTs. During interviews, VSHs reported that their role was a strategic one: to raise the profile of CLA and build relationships with key stakeholders to promote effective and coordinated service delivery between education and care. Analysis of attainment data showed that pilot authorities compared well to national averages, and most children were considered to have made educational progress; however, Berridge et al. (2009) acknowledged that this trend was also seen in authorities without virtual schools, and a combination of factors were likely to have improved outcomes. The virtual school pilot was perceived to have successfully raised the priority of educating CLA, and the report maintained that VSHs played a valuable role in improving CLA outcomes. While the authors acknowledged that participant groups were small, by triangulating multiple sources of data they hoped to provide a more holistic analysis of impact.

Berridge (2012), who was involved in the initial pilot evaluation, used the virtual school pilot as a case study to reflect on the relationship between child welfare research and the policy-making process. He explained that piloting was a popular way for governments to test new initiatives, but emphasised that pilots must be able to run their course and be transparent about whether the project aimed to explore *how* something worked or *whether* something worked. His paper cautioned against the government's tendency to implement policy before researchers have properly concluded their evaluations, which, he revealed, was the case with the virtual school pilot. Based on the positive evaluation of the virtual school pilot by Berridge et al. (2009), both policy makers and LAs were eager to roll-out the virtual school model more widely; by early 2010, two-thirds of LAs had appointed a VSH (Berridge, 2012) and several months later, all LAs were expected to have established a virtual school (DCSF, 2010).

The 2008 Children and Young Persons Act and the Development of a Statutory DT Role

The DT role gained statutory footing with the introduction of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, which required all state-maintained schools to appoint a teacher responsible for promoting the educational achievement of CLA. The Act also placed a duty on governing bodies to ensure that DTs undertook appropriate training. The regulations outlined that the DT must be either a qualified teacher working at the school, or the headteacher or acting headteacher (DCSF, 2009a). The following year, initial statutory guidance summarised the key roles and responsibilities of DTs and reiterated that DTs would benefit from having a senior position in schools, must receive appropriate training, and must have a range of skills and knowledge to promote the educational achievement of CLA (DCSF, 2009b, 2009a).

2.4. The Current Legislative Framework

The following section outlines legislation and policy that frame the current national context for virtual schools and DTs.

The 2014 Children and Families Act and Statutory Guidance on the VSH Role

In 2012, recommendations that the VSH role should be made statutory were outlined in an independent inquiry into the attainment of CLA (APPG, 2012) and in 2014, the Children and Families Act placed a statutory responsibility on all LAs to appoint a VSH. Guidance on the role and responsibilities of the VSH were published (Rees & The National Virtual School Network, 2015) and updated in 2019 (National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH), 2019). Guidance described the role of the VSH as the lead officer for ensuring arrangements were in place to improve CLA's educational outcomes, including those placed outside the authority's boundaries. Additionally, guidance (NAVSH, 2019; p.11) described six key operational areas:

'The VSH should –

- know who is on the roll of their virtual school
- know where they live and where they go to school
- know, at any time, how they are doing and be able to say if that is good enough
- determine what actions to take if they are not doing well enough
- evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve attainment and progress
- understand their accountabilities and how their virtual school will be inspected and its impact judged.'

To meet these objectives, VSHs were required to understand the roles of, and establish working relationships with, all professionals working around CLA and be responsible for monitoring and distributing PP+ funding (DfE, 2014).

The 2017 Children and Social Work Act and Statutory Support for All Care-Experienced Children

The introduction of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 placed a new statutory duty on LAs to promote the educational achievement of *all* care-experienced children, to formally recognise that the needs of children do not disappear once they leave care. This included previously looked after children who were no longer in care because they were the subject of an adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangements order. Following these changes, new statutory guidance was published for virtual schools (DfE, 2018b) and DTs (DfE, 2018c) that provided details about their roles and responsibilities. The updated guidance specified that DTs should –

- Be a central point of contact in schools and work collaboratively with wider services.
- Work with the VSH to promote education as a priority.
- Ensure school staff understand wider factors that affect how care-experienced children learn and achieve.
- Develop or review whole-school policies that promote outcomes for care-experienced children, and ensure they are not inadvertently disadvantaged.
- Promote a culture where children are involved in decision-making, can share their views, are encouraged to participate in activities and can access support.
- Advise teachers about how to differentiate teaching strategies and support the learning and social-emotional needs of care-experienced children.
- Work directly with children to encourage high aspirations and ensure they are involved in target setting and decision-making.
- Liaise with parents/carers and guardians to promote good home-school links and ensure effective communication.

- Develop and implement PEPs.
- Work with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) around any safeguarding concerns relating to care-experienced children.

2.5. Virtual School Research

To date, there has been limited research on the role and impact of the virtual school. An overview and evaluation of key literature is presented below.

Roles and Responsibilities

To explore perceptions around the current and future role of virtual schools, Simpson (2012) interviewed five virtual school staff and surveyed over 50 DTs. The perceived key functions of virtual schools included: raising the profile of CLA; training DTs and wider school staff; providing enrichment and learning opportunities for CLA; supporting transition; and tracking and monitoring data on attainment, attendance, exclusions, and placements. Participants suggested that the future role of virtual schools might include developing post-16 and early years provision, providing further support for adopted children, and extending their remit to include other vulnerable groups, such as children in need and child protection cases. The study concluded that the virtual school model was effectively helping to raise the profile of CLA, however Simpson (2012) acknowledged that conclusions were based on self-reports from virtual school staff, and objective outcome data was not a key focus of the study. While this qualitative study provides useful perceptions about the role of the virtual school before it gained statutory footing, transferability of findings was limited by the small-scale sample within a single LA.

Jackson's (2015) case study described the work of an experienced VSH, outlining a range of initiatives and enrichment activities overseen by one virtual school.

Jackson's (2015) VSH explained that a key function of the virtual school was to provide training and support to carers, DTs, social workers, and school governors; the core purpose of the virtual school was described as *supporting schools* to raise the achievement of CLA by holding them to account for children's outcomes. Jackson (2015) argued that attempts to improve education outcomes for CLA would only be possible by making change at a systemic level, advocating in favour of the virtual school model. Jackson's findings provide insight into the strategic role of the virtual school, which mirror statutory guidance on the role (Children and Families Act, 2014), however the small case study limits wider generalisability.

Impact

Ofsted (2012) explored the impact of virtual schools in nine LAs. Inspectors evaluated multiple sources of data; they tracked more than 50 CLA to examine the effectiveness of the educational support they received, and spoke to a range of professionals, including virtual school staff, social workers, carers, DTs, and children. The report concluded that there was evidence of improving outcomes for CLA across all nine authorities, including greater attainment, increased attendance, and reduced exclusions. Findings outlined that the most effective virtual schools worked closely with other professionals to promote an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach for supporting CLA. By improving multiagency working, VSHs were able to encourage education and care services to increase their understanding and awareness of each other's professional remit, helping to raise the profile of children's educational needs. Although inspection findings were positive, there was a notable lack of hard data on educational outcomes in the report, and without any longitudinal evaluation of the impact of virtual schools, findings provided more of a snapshot from the LAs involved.

To explore how virtual schools helped improve educational outcomes since the role became statutory, Sebba and Berridge (2019) undertook interviews with 16 VSHs. Participants felt the virtual school helped to support children's outcomes by taking on a strategic role: the core function of virtual schools was described as supporting and working with adults who came into direct contact with CLA, and building relationships with key partners to prioritise education. Sebba and Berridge (2019) concluded that, despite a strong perception that VSHs helped improve educational outcomes, little was known about *how* the VSH contributed to the education of CLA as sample sizes were often small, anecdotal and there was little data linking the range of innovative enrichment activities with national outcome data.

Recently, Read et al. (2020) undertook a mixed-methods project to explore how PP+ funding was allocated and used by virtual schools and stakeholders to support CLA's educational outcomes. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered using surveys and interviews to explore how participants used and measured the impact of funding, including examples of good practice. They concluded that the quality of PEPs and effective multiagency working played a central role in the allocation of funding. Concerns were raised that funding was not always used to specifically support CLA, but used more widely to meet budget gaps in education and social care. Additionally, the impact of funding was often measured using children's attainment and it could be challenging to measure the impact of funding on children's social and emotional outcomes. Ultimately, participants expressed a need for more guidance about how to use PP+ effectively. The authors made a series of recommendations for improving the impact of funding, however it is important to acknowledge that findings were based on the views of the specific sample and cannot be used to reflect the experiences of all virtual schools or stakeholders.

Transition Support

In Simpson's (2012) study, virtual schools were perceived as having an instrumental role in supporting CLA during times of transition; Driscoll (2013) explored this aspect of the virtual school role further by investigating how CLA nearing the end of Key Stage 4 could be encouraged and supported to continue their education. Interviews with DTs and VSHs in four LAs reported challenges in ensuring successful transitions for students in Year 11 because of the collective impact of multiple transitions that occur at this stage of life for CLA. Driscoll (2013) concluded that virtual schools were well-placed to coordinate effective communication between education and care, particularly regarding transition planning, and welcomed the government's intention to make the VSH a statutory role. While the paper provided a useful account of the challenges surrounding CLA's post-16 transition, Driscoll (2013) acknowledged that the sample was small and may not be representative of the wider population.

Social, Emotional and Psychological Support

Rivers (2018) reported that an increasing focus of virtual schools was to address the mental health and emotional wellbeing of CLA. Rivers' (2018) case study represented a personal account of her own experience as a VSH and used the paper to describe opportunities and challenges faced in the role. By delivering attachment training, increasing support for children at risk of exclusion, and promoting wellbeing interventions, Rivers (2018) reported that her virtual school, which supported over 1000 CLA, helped reduce permanent exclusions to zero and fixed-term exclusions by almost a quarter, however caution was raised about attributing this success to the virtual school alone. Rivers (2018) explained that developing strong relationships with partners and having a senior position within the LA helped to bolster the support and influence of the virtual school, yet suggested that the concept of the virtual school and

VSH continues to evolve. Although findings from Rivers (2018) were drawn from a single case study, key conclusions echoed those from previous research: that the role of the virtual school is a strategic one that can support academic outcomes and facilitate change for CLA by coordinating and working with wider professionals.

Drew and Banerjee (2019) explored how virtual schools addressed broader psychological and emotional factors that impacted CLA's educational outcomes, including attachment, relationships, and mental health. Survey findings from VSHs demonstrated a range of initiatives aimed at supporting emotional well-being, including mentoring, training on attachment and implications for learning and behaviour, mental health interventions, extracurricular activities and support during transitions. Drew and Banerjee (2019) described how the virtual school role was both direct and strategic; supporting multiagency partners to raise the profile of education for CLA, while working directly with schools, parents/carers, and children. They concluded that the initiatives, intervention, and support described by virtual schools could be conceptualised as 'fostering resilience' at both an individual and systemic level, and all approaches emphasised the importance of positive relationships (p.113). While response rates from surveys were low and the study lacked triangulation of outcome data, findings provided a useful snapshot of broader provision available to CLA.

Kelly et al. (2020) published an evaluation of an Attachment-Aware Schools Programme, developed by one virtual school in Derbyshire. The programme, which had been running for five years and included 77 schools across the county, aimed to build attachment-awareness in schools by equipping staff with knowledge and skills to attune themselves to children. The mixed-methods research evaluated data from the first year of the project (2014-2015) and used a combination of pre- and post-questionnaires, followed by interviews, to explore progress made by schools in

becoming more attachment-aware. Kelly et al. (2020) concluded that the programme had a positive impact on the ethos of all schools involved, and participants reported that attachment-aware approaches had become a central part of their day-to-day roles. This included a greater understanding across schools about the impact of developmental trauma and attachment needs on learning and behaviour. While a promising project, the study only evaluated findings from the first year of the programme (within a single authority), and longer-term impact has not yet been evaluated. Additionally, the authors acknowledged it can be difficult to accurately measure change in a standardised way and recognised that wider factors may have impacted the interpretation of their findings.

2.6. Designated Teacher Research

As with virtual school research, there is limited literature on the role and impact of DTs. An overview of existing research is presented below.

Role Perceptions

Early perceptions of the DT role were captured by Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003) who undertook a study to identify best practice in schools for supporting CLA, with a focus on DT views. Data was gathered through interviews in 20 schools across eight LAs with over 100 individuals, including virtual school staff, DTs, SENCOs, headteachers, parents/carers and children. During interviews, DTs reported holding multiple roles in school, yet training experiences varied. Perceived responsibilities included liaison with other professionals and parents/carers; being an advocate for CLA; monitoring and overseeing progress; and preparing and maintaining PEPs. To be effective, DTs felt that they needed to hold strong relationships with teaching staff and senior managers in education and social services. Multiagency working was a

large part of the role, but coordinating with social care could be challenging due to heavy caseloads, high turnover and understaffing of social workers. Findings from interviews with wider staff revealed that, while DTs and headteachers had a clear understanding of the role, other teachers, pupils, and parents/carers appeared less clear about the role and responsibilities of DTs. However, the study was conducted before the role became statutory and at a time when schools were adjusting to the role requirements.

In Hayden's (2005) study exploring the quality of PEPs, none of the ten DTs interviewed had additional time or resources allocated to their DT duties, despite holding multiple roles. Additionally, some DTs reported never being consulted about taking on the DT role and had found the title simply added to their job description. While DTs were eager to support outcomes for CLA, they needed clear and up-to-date information about the children to implement effective strategies and information, but coordinating with social care could be challenging. As with findings from Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003), Hayden's (2005) study helped capture DTs' perceptions before the role gained statutory footing, however the small sample from one LA may not reflect experiences of the wider population.

Connelly et al. (2008) explored the role of DTs from a Scottish perspective, interviewing 11 participants to understand how they supported CLA. While the policy context for Scotland differs from the English context, similar concerns about the education and attainment of CLA were identified and in 2003, Scottish schools were called to designate a senior manager to be responsible for all CLA. As with findings from previous studies, Connelly et al. (2008) reported that communication and information sharing with social care could be challenging for DTs, which impacted working relationships and multiagency working. Designated teachers recognised the

importance of their role in coordinating support for CLA, however they reported having to learn how to enact the role as they went, which could lead to a sense of uncertainty about whether they were interpreting their duties correctly. Although this small-scale Scottish study is limited in its transferability, it aligns with DT's experiences from earlier and subsequent studies (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Hayden, 2005).

Confidence and Effectiveness

To capture DTs' sense of confidence, Simpson (2012) surveyed over 50 DTs about how supported they felt in their role. A large majority (90%) of DTs felt confident in their role, however the limitations of a self-selecting sample were that those who felt more confident may have chosen to complete the questionnaire. Designated teachers reported receiving both practical advice and emotional support from virtual schools, helping them to meet the educational and emotional needs of CLA at school. Simpson (2012) highlighted that DTs' confidence appeared to be influenced by the amount of support received from virtual schools and concluded that for DTs to fulfil their role effectively, they must be adequately supported by virtual schools.

In contrast to Simpson's (2012) findings, DTs interviewed by Goodall (2014) reported a greater sense of uncertainty about their role and rarely reported using the virtual school as a means of support. In Goodall's (2014) study, DTs reported that their role required great resiliency and personal commitment, and they found it challenging to balance their role with additional duties. Many DTs referenced the changing nature of their responsibilities over time, particularly as the number of CLA increased. They emphasised that supporting CLA required a carefully joined-up approach, with particular importance placed on timely information sharing between services.

Designated teachers reported feeling a sense of isolation in their role as they were often solely responsible for CLA in their settings, and many lacked contact with other DTs. This created a sense of unknown about how others were enacting their responsibilities, contributing to feelings of uncertainty about their personal effectiveness. Designated teachers expressed frustration at the lack of understanding other teachers and professionals had about their role, and many felt they lacked influence to prioritise education among care professionals. Goodall (2014) concluded that DTs would benefit from greater support from virtual schools to improve their sense of confidence, effectiveness, and partnership with social care, and highlighted the need for future research to raise awareness and understanding about the DT role.

Waterman's (2020) research presented a psycho-social exploration of four DTs (and four virtual school advisory teachers) experiences of supporting CLA, emphasising the emotional impact the role can have on DTs. Waterman (2020) used unstructured interviews that utilised a Free Associative Narrative Method to understand DTs' experiences; findings highlighted that working with CLA and learning about the traumatic events that children had been through could have a significant emotional impact on DTs. However, there were few opportunities in school for DTs to reflect on their experiences or access supervision that could better support them in their role. Additionally, DTs expressed negative experiences of the systems around CLA, confusion about the corporate parenting role, and a sense of powerlessness within the system. Waterman's (2020) research provided insight into DTs' experiences using a psychoanalytic lens, however the small-scale sample may limit transferability.

Personal Education Plans

A core responsibility of DTs is to monitor and review PEPs. In 2000, PEPs became a statutory requirement for CLA; shortly after, Hayden (2005) explored how DTs and social workers from one LA perceived the effectiveness of PEPs. Findings illustrated that although social workers and teachers were critical of some aspects of the plans, PEPs were accepted as useful tools for helping raise the profile of children's educational needs. Hayden (2005) concluded that, despite practical challenges associated with the process, review meetings provided a forum for care and education professionals to collaborate and promote CLA's educational outcomes.

More recently, Parker (2017) explored the impact of professionals who contributed to PEPs by observing three review meetings to identify participants' roles. Parker (2017) concluded that the key actors helping to mobilise change during PEP processes were the virtual school, who held the legislative framework for change to occur, and DTs who brought essential knowledge about the school system and resources to the meeting. Parker (2017) argued that social workers were less likely to enact change to children's educational outcomes during meetings; while social workers helped prompt discussion, they were not involved in direct decision-making around educational targets. While Parker (2017) and Hayden's (2005) studies were limited by small samples, findings reflect wider policy and research that highlight the importance of the DT during PEP processes to promote and prioritise educational outcomes in collaboration with social care.

Multiagency Working

To identify examples of collaborative working between schools and care, Higgs (2006) interviewed DTs, social workers and CLA. To be effective in their corporate

parenting role, DTs cited good communication systems with social care as essential, and expressed that having a senior position in school gave them greater influence when working with outside professionals and fellow teachers. However, DTs did not appear to have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of social workers, or the wider systems operating within children's services. Higgs (2006) concluded that this lack of shared understanding about the role and responsibilities of other professionals was impacting effective joint-working between school and care. Higgs (2006) undertook follow-up interviews two years later, and DTs reported that as their relationship with social care developed, joined-up working had improved, emphasising the importance of shared understanding between partners. While Higgs' (2006) research is limited by a small cohort from a single authority, the study presents a useful case study on perceptions of DT as corporate parents and reflects similar challenges to multiagency working as highlighted in previous research (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Hayden, 2005).

Norwich et al. (2010) surveyed EPs to understand how they supported CLA, which included gathering views about the DT role. Educational psychologists presented mixed views about the role; some felt there was a lack of clarity among school staff about DTs' responsibilities, and DTs were not always aware about what the EP could offer. However, views about DTs were not the main focus of this study, and the authors did not explore this issue in depth. In contrast, Whitehouse (2014) explored DTs' perceptions of EPs. Findings indicated that DTs recognised EPs as a valuable resource, but generally called on them for advice about children's learning over support around wider social, emotional, or behaviour needs. Designated teachers generally perceived EPs as being useful for providing support at the individual level, through observation and direct assessment, but appeared to place less value on

systemic support, such as consultation and training. Although DTs valued having a named EP who they could build a working relationship with, their comments suggested that there was a mismatch between how EPs work, and the type of support that DTs expected, indicating the need for greater role clarity between these professionals.

2.7. Summary

This review has highlighted the evolution of the virtual school and DT role over time, influenced by changes in policy and research that have helped increase awareness and understanding about educational outcomes for CLA and the systemic impact of multiagency working between education and care. The review has emphasised the importance and benefit of having a champion for care-experienced children at different levels of the system, yet despite their integral role in coordinating services, there is little research exploring DTs' perceptions and experiences. The DT plays an integral role in promoting academic achievement in school and coordinating with social care, however the literature highlights mixed reports about the level of support and sense of effectiveness that DTs feel.

While studies from the literature review have helped to provide initial context about the work of DTs over time, very few studies have looked specifically at DTs' perceptions about their role and the underlying factors impacting their experiences. Of those that did explore the DT role, sample sizes were small, limiting generalisability beyond the single authority where the research was undertaken. Therefore, rather than using a predetermined theory or deductive framework to inform the research questions and discussion, the decision was made to explore DTs experiences without any pre-existing assumptions about factors that might be impacting their role. For this reason, broad and exploratory research questions were developed to enable key

themes and conclusions to be drawn directly from analysis and interpretation of the data within the current research. This is known as a *posteriori* approach, where knowledge and conclusions are derived from the data itself, rather than an *a priori* approach, where knowledge is justified independently of experience (O'Leary, 2007).

Much of the current literature is based on individual case studies and few have explored the experiences of a wider sample of DTs; this current research hopes to add to the body of literature by gathering views from a national sample of DTs and virtual schools to investigate how statutory recommendations about the role relate to DT practice, as well as barriers and facilitating factors that impact the role and perceptions around DTs' personal effectiveness. By gaining insight into DTs views, this project hopes to inform future policy development and identify systems and processes that may be used to advance and support the DT role in England.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological approaches of the research, and their rationale. It explores theoretical underpinnings and epistemology, and outlines procedural methods relating to data collection and analysis. Considerations around the research quality and ethics are presented, including an overview of pilot data.

3.2. Aims and Research Questions

This research hopes to increase awareness and understanding about the DT role in England. The research aims to explore how DTs experience and enact their role, including key responsibilities; barriers and facilitating factors that impact their role; and perceptions around personal effectiveness. This includes developing a greater understanding about how DTs work with other professionals, including virtual schools, social workers, and EPs. Findings hope to inform policy and further identify systems and processes required to support the DT role. Three research questions were developed to meet these aims:

1. How do statutory regulations or recommendations about the DT role relate to DT practice?
2. What barriers and facilitating factors impact how DTs experience and enact their role?
 - a. What are some of the key challenges faced by DTs and what factors help mitigate against these challenges?
 - b. What factors impact DTs' sense of personal effectiveness?
3. What barriers and facilitating factors impact how DTs work with other professionals, including virtual schools, social workers, and EPs?

3.3. The Research Paradigm

This research is positioned within a critical realist epistemology and ontology. From an ontological perspective, critical realism acknowledges the existence of a reality that operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it; in this sense, reality is not 'objectively' knowable (Robson & McCartan, 2016). From an epistemological perspective, critical realism argues that knowledge is a social and historical product, therefore notions of 'truth' and 'knowledge' are context and concept dependent. This approach suggests that people's descriptions and understanding of the world are subjective and experiential; therefore, information must be interpreted to understand the underlying mechanisms that create certain phenomena (Willig, 2013). Using a critical realist approach, this research gathers the personal and subjective experiences of DTs to explore underlying factors that influence their role perception. From a critical realist perspective, participants' views and experiences are indicative of their lived 'reality', however the meaning attached to experiences are seen as being mediated and impacted by social, cultural and political contexts (Willig, 1999). By gathering, analysing and interpreting data, we can begin to explore evidence for underlying mechanisms that impact experience, and the contexts that they operate in (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

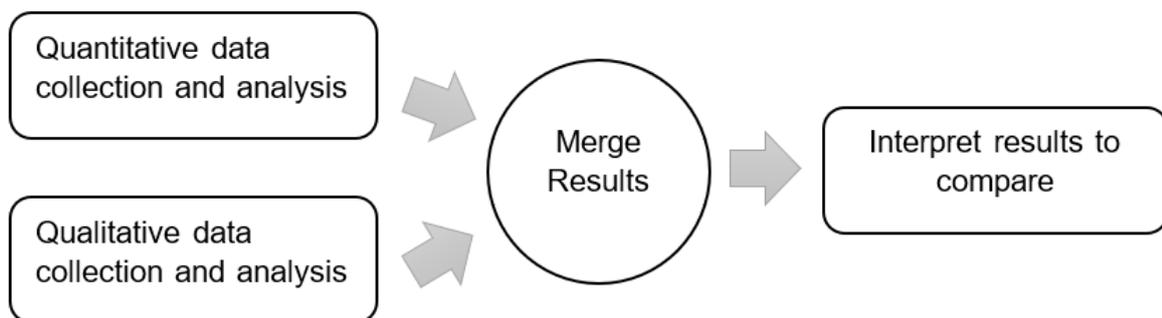
3.4. Research Design

The current study employs a *mixed-methods design* to extend and deepen understanding about the DT role. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define mixed methods research as an approach that collects and integrates quantitative and qualitative data, to gain additional insight beyond what could be provided by using either method alone. While a mixed-methods approach can draw on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research, this approach requires extensive data collection, time-intensive

data analysis and familiarity with both methodologies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, research combining qualitative and quantitative methods has the potential to increase confidence and credibility in findings through triangulation (Bryman, 2012). A critical realist position aligns itself with a mixed-methods approach, pragmatically combining quantitative and qualitative methods to respond to research questions (Olsen, 2004). While quantitative methods can develop reliable descriptions and identify patterns among larger populations, qualitative methods enable an in-depth exploration of participants' attitudes, thoughts and actions, helping to reveal complex concepts and relationships that are harder to capture through predetermined categories (McEvoy & Richards, 2006).

The current study uses a *convergent mixed-methods design* to describe and explore how DTs perceive and experience their role using questionnaires and semi-structured telephone interviews. This approach uses a single-phase design, collecting qualitative and quantitative data, analysing them separately and comparing results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); see *Figure 1*.

Figure 1
Convergent Design (One-Phase Design). From Creswell and Creswell (2018)



Underlying assumptions of this approach are that quantitative and qualitative data provide different types of information that together can best explain a psychological phenomenon, providing breadth and depth. Data analysis using this

approach has three phases: analysing quantitative data statistically; analysing qualitative results for key themes using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); and integrating analysis by merging and comparing results to confirm or disconfirm findings from each method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.5. Sampling Strategy

For pragmatic and practical purposes, this study employed a *volunteer sampling strategy*, a form of purposive sampling where willing individuals self-select to participate (Jupp, 2006). This study sought the views from a sample of virtual school staff and DTs. In England, every LA is statutorily obligated to have a virtual school (Children and Families Act, 2014), and every state-maintained school must have a DT. Currently, there are 151 virtual schools and over 20,000 DTs based in state-funded primary and secondary schools across England (DfE, 2019c). As with most research, it is neither practical nor feasible to gather the views of every member of the population, however this study attempted to gain a representative sample by inviting all virtual schools to participate in the survey, who were then asked to disseminate research information to DTs within their area. To be eligible to participate, individuals had to be either be a member of the virtual school (one representative per LA) or a current DT. There were no exclusive criteria around demographics, length of experience, or additional roles/responsibilities. Utilising an opt-in approach, participants took an active step in agreeing to participate by following the online link to participate in the survey, then actively chose to attach their email address if they were interested in receiving follow-up information about the project and future involvement (i.e. a follow-up semi-structured telephone interview). While an opt-in approach can lead to lower response rates or a less representative sample, it was the practical option as participants must volunteer willingly.

3.6. Procedure

Project information was emailed to virtual schools across England, inviting participation in the survey and asking them to disseminate project information to DTs within their area. The email invited one member of staff from each virtual school to complete the survey, and individual DTs from any setting. Project information was also advertised online through SEN forums and online mediums (e.g. NAVSH, SENCO Forum); permission was sought from gatekeeper organisations before advertising; the online survey was open for 8 weeks (October-December 2020).

As well as including information sheets and consent forms via email, participants were prompted to review information and provide consent via the online survey platform. After completing the survey, participants were invited to leave their email address if they wanted to receive a summary of findings, or if they were open to participating in a telephone interview. Designated teachers interested in an interview were contacted by email to arrange a convenient date/time. All interviews took place in December 2020. Interviewees were asked to provide verbal consent before each interview and had the opportunity to ask questions throughout the process. With permission, interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription.

3.7. Participants

Participants comprised a sample of virtual school staff (surveys: n=44) and DTs (surveys: n=142; interviews: n=16). Attrition for surveys is not uncommon, and in the current study a total of 55 individuals left the online survey platform before completing all questions. Of these 55 individuals, only 22 began responding to the survey questions (while the remaining 33 left the platform immediately after reading the information sheet and completing the consent form). The decision was made not to

include incomplete responses as all participants were informed that they could choose to leave the study at any point, without any explanation. Because it was unclear whether these individuals wished for their data to be included or not, the ethical decision was made to omit these responses.

Questionnaire Respondents

Forty-four virtual schools completed the survey and agreed to disseminate research details to DTs in their area. This represents a response rate of 29% (44/151). While there is little agreement about what constitutes an adequate response rate (Robson & McCartan, 2016), Gillham (2007) suggested that 30% can be considered an average rate for questionnaires sent externally. Once disseminated, a total of 142 DTs responded to the questionnaire.

Of the virtual school participants, the majority were either VSHs (n=22) or deputy VSHs (n=6). Remaining participants included an EP who worked with the virtual school (n=1) and virtual school staff with varying job titles (n=15), including education consultants and support officers, lead advisors for different stages/phases of education, and academic progress/improvement officers. Participants' experience ranged from 2 months to 20 years ($M = 48.43$ months, $SD = 52.07$) and were based in virtual schools broadly across England (see *Table 1*).

Table 1*Regional Demographics for Survey Responses: Virtual Schools and DTs*

Region	Virtual school staff Frequency (%)	DTs Frequency (%)
North East	5 (11%)	13 (9%)
North West	10 (23%)	18 (13%)
Yorkshire and the Humber	4 (9%)	6 (4%)
West Midlands	6 (14%)	35 (25%)
East Midlands	2 (5%)	13 (9%)
South West	1 (2%)	20 (14%)
South East	7 (16%)	26 (18%)
East of England	4 (9%)	1 (1%)
Greater London	5 (11%)	10 (7%)
Total	44 (100%)	142 (100%)

Of the DTs surveyed, there was considerable regional variation (see *Table 1*). Setting type ranged from early years to further education; the most common stages of education were primary and secondary (see *Table 2*).

Table 2*Designated Teachers' Stage of Education*

Stage of Education	Frequency (%)
Early Years	2 (1%)
Early Years and Primary	16 (11%)
Primary	55 (39%)
Secondary	45 (32%)
Primary and Secondary	8 (6%)
Secondary and Further Education	1 (1%)
Further Education	2 (1%)
Other*	13 (9%)
Total	142 (100%)

Note. *'Other' responses represent special schools that supported students across a range of ages and stages of education.

Participants' experience as DTs ranged from two months to 30 years, ($M = 60.0$ months; $SD = 46.41$). Responses included DTs who had been in the role when it was first introduced in 2000, as well as those who had only experienced the role in its current form, supporting the generalisability of findings. Participating DTs worked in a range of settings, split broadly into mainstream and specialist settings. Approximately three-quarters (77%; $n=109$) were based in mainstream settings (most commonly LA-maintained community schools and academies). One-quarter (23%; $n=33$) were based in specialist settings, with the majority in special schools (see *Table 3*).

Table 3
Designated Teachers' Education Settings

Setting	Type	Frequency (%)	Total (%)
Mainstream setting	Academy	34 (24%)	109 (77%)
	Community or LA-maintained	62 (44%)	
	Faith School	7 (5%)	
	Foundation School	1 (1%)	
	Free School	1 (1%)	
	Private or Independent School	2 (1%)	
	Voluntary School	2 (1%)	
Specialist setting	Pupil Referral Unit	3 (2%)	33 (23%)
	Special School	16 (11%)	
	Independent Specialist or Residential Setting	8 (6%)	
	Alternative Provision	2 (1%)	
	Other Specialist Setting	4 (3%)	
Total			142 (100%)

Interview Participants

Sixteen DTs (11 female, 5 male) undertook a follow-up interview. Participants were dispersed across the country: North East ($n=1$; 6%); Yorkshire ($n=1$; 6%); West Midlands ($n=2$; 13%); East Midlands ($n=1$; 6%); South West ($n=5$; 31%); South East ($n=5$; 31%); and East England ($n=1$; 6%). Eleven DTs worked in mainstream settings; five worked in specialist settings. School stage ranged from early years to secondary, and two participants were from special schools that supported students across a range

of ages/stages of education. School size ranged from 30-1400 total students, with as many as 30 care-experienced children in one setting. One participant indicated that they currently had zero CLA on roll as five had moved placement between academic years. Number of CLA was not used as an exclusion criterion as it was recognised that CLA can move in and out of placements frequently (DfE, 2013; *The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations*, 2010). Participants held a range of additional roles, from headteacher, deputy or assistant head, to SENCO, DSL, subject/class teacher or advisory teacher. See *Table 4* for demographic details.

Table 4
Demographic Details for DT Interview Participants.

DT	Sex	Region	School stage	Setting type	School type	Total pupils in school	Total care-experienced children	Years' experience as DT	Additional roles
DT1	Male	East	Secondary	Specialist	Pupil referral unit	186	11	7.5 years	Deputy head, SENCO, DSL
DT2	Female	South West	Primary and Secondary	Specialist	Pupil referral unit	60	0	2.5 years	Advisory teacher
DT3	Female	South East	Early Years and Primary	Mainstream	Community school	182	7	14 years	Headteacher, SENCO, DSL
DT4	Male	North East	Primary	Mainstream	Community school	680	13	<1 year	Deputy head, DSL
DT5	Male	South West	Other	Specialist	Special School	127	16	7 years	Headteacher
DT6	Male	South West	Secondary	Mainstream	Academy	750	11	1 year	Subject teacher
DT7	Male	South East	Secondary	Mainstream	Community school	1400	9	3 years	Assistant head, DSL, teacher
DT8	Female	East Midlands	Other	Specialist	Special School	171	29	4 years	Assistant head, DSL
DT9	Female	South West	Primary	Mainstream	Community school	455	7	4 years	SENCO, deputy DSL
DT10	Female	South West	Primary	Mainstream	Foundation school	600	16	20 years	Deputy head, DSL
DT11	Female	West Midlands	Primary	Mainstream	Community school	358	6	10 years	Deputy head, SENCO, DSL
DT12	Female	South East	Secondary	Mainstream	Academy	1430	6	7 years	Assistant head, DSL, teacher
DT13	Female	Yorkshire	Secondary	Mainstream	Free school	612	3	2 years	DSL
DT14	Female	South East	Secondary	Specialist	Independent specialist or residential setting	30	30	4 years	SENCO, class teacher
DT15	Female	South East	Primary	Mainstream	Academy	457	3	10 years	Inclusion Manager, DSL
DT16	Female	West Midlands	Early Years and Primary	Mainstream	Community school	280	6	7 years	Deputy head

3.8. Materials and Measures

Within this mixed-method research, quantitative and qualitative methods were applied using surveys and semi-structured interviews.

Online questionnaires were chosen to gather responses from a wide sample of participants in a quick and accessible way. Questionnaires offer a convenient tool for collecting data as respondents can complete questionnaires at a date and pace of their choosing (Bryman, 2012). While responses from fixed questions may lack detail, questionnaires can provide generalisable information about a population as questions are standardised, presenting a useful tool for exploring patterns and trends (Mertens, 2010). Although data can be affected by the characteristics of respondents (i.e. memory, knowledge, motivation and social desirability), questionnaires allow anonymity, which can encourage participants to be honest and open about their experiences (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Using questionnaires, the current research hoped to gain descriptive data about the distribution and relationships between DT roles, responsibilities, and characteristics. Questionnaires also incorporated open-ended questions to gain qualitative information that contributed towards the in-depth integration of findings.

Two online questionnaires were developed to explore the views of virtual schools and DTs (see *Appendix C*). Questionnaires for virtual schools used open and closed questions to explore: contextual questions about the virtual school setting; virtual school perceptions of the role and responsibilities of DTs, including key challenges and facilitating factors; and the services, training or support that virtual schools offered DTs. Questionnaires for DTs used open and closed questions to explore: contextual questions about their school setting; the type of provision and

support offered to care-experienced children; experiences of being a DT, including key responsibilities and challenges; and experiences working with other professionals.

Following ethical approval, questionnaires were piloted with a sample of virtual school staff and DTs in October 2020, then revised before final distribution to ensure the length, structure, content and question type were valid and appropriate (Mertens, 2010). The pilot participants did not raise any significant concerns about the survey layout, content or structure, however minor revisions were made to simplify the process and decrease the time spent completing questionnaires. For example, drop-down options were provided for questions asking participants to report on the number of children or staff in their setting (to provide estimates rather than searching for specific details); a question about the number of children with SEN was removed as it was not relevant to the research questions; a question was added to explore additional services and agencies participants worked with; and wording was clarified for a question that asked DTs how they measured their sense of effectiveness (i.e. by incorporating the qualifying statement: '*how do you know you have met your duties or done a good job?*').

Semi-structured telephone interviews were chosen to gather qualitative data to explore DTs' experiences in detail. Semi-structured interviews are a common tool in qualitative research, allowing researchers to ask pre-determined, open-ended questions that encourage participants to share views and experiences (Given, 2008). For pragmatic purposes, telephone interviews were chosen over face-to-face interviews due to participants' regional variation and for safety purposes during the Covid-19 pandemic. While telephone interviews may impact the rapport between researcher and respondents and depth of answers, this method is recognised and acknowledged as a highly efficient tool for exploring views (Bryman, 2012). It is hoped

that limitations were mitigated by the interviewer's skill and ethical considerations towards ensuring participants' comfort during interviews. Data gathered using interviews were used to complement and triangulate findings from questionnaires by providing holistic and context-sensitive qualitative data.

The interview schedule (see *Appendix D*) was piloted in June 2019 as part of the author's small-scale research project. During the pilot, six DTs were interviewed about perceptions of their role, including key responsibilities, highlights and challenges, and their experiences regarding a mentoring programme for CLA. Findings shed light on DTs' perceptions and reflections on their position within the education and care systems, emphasising the need for greater role clarity and support for DTs (see *Appendix A* for a summary of findings). The interview schedule was adapted to focus on the DT role and experiences with multiagency working. Questions around mentoring were replaced with a question about DTs' sense of effectiveness. Additionally, a question was modified that asked DTs to reflect on their working relationships with wider professionals and agencies (rather than limiting the scope to virtual schools, social care, and EPs).

Interviews began by building rapport, outlining the study's purpose, and obtaining verbal consent for the interview to be recorded. Questions were designed to be open-ended to encourage participants to reflect meaningfully on their experiences, and follow-up prompts were used when further information was required. During interviews, DTs were questioned about their experiences, including: role expectations, initial and ongoing training, networking opportunities, key roles and responsibilities and how others perceived their role; personal perceptions on their sense of effectiveness and where they go to access additional support; and experiences working with other professionals.

3.9. Data Analysis

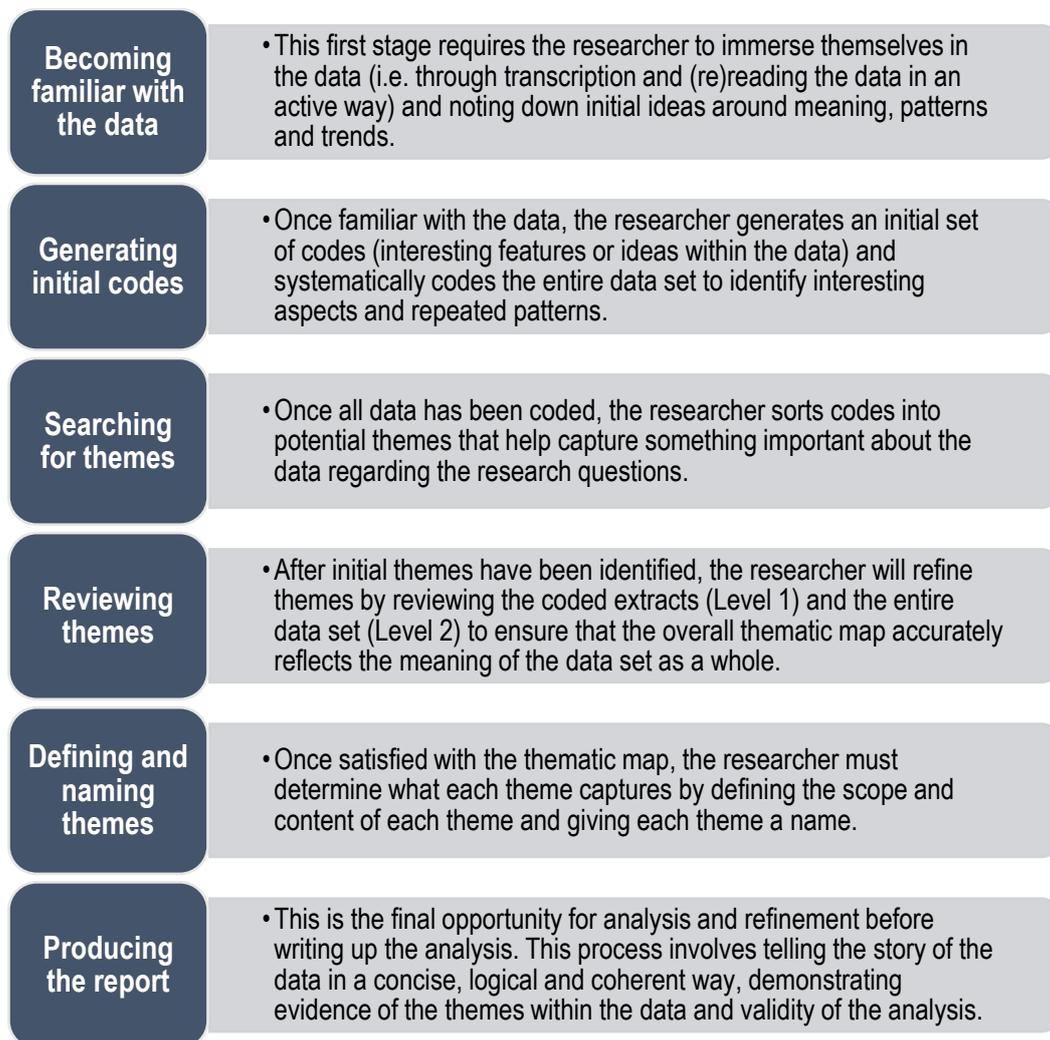
Data analysis using a convergent mixed-methods approach has three phases: analysing quantitative data; analysing qualitative results for themes; then integrating analysis in a side-by-side comparison (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data from closed survey questions were analysed using a statistical analysis programme to provide descriptive statistics and explore trends, patterns and relationships between characteristics (Mertens, 2010). Questionnaire responses from virtual schools and DTs were analysed separately and compared to explore convergence or divergence.

Qualitative data (including open questions in surveys) were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a process involving the systematic search for common threads of meaning, before grouping data into categories and themes (Willig, 2013). Unlike other methods of qualitative data analysis (i.e. discourse analysis or interpretative phenomenological analysis), thematic analysis is a flexible tool that is not linked to a particular epistemological or theoretical paradigm but can be applied to a range of qualitative research (Terry et al., 2017). An essentialist or realist framework was used to report the experiences, meaning and reality of participants utilising a data-driven, inductive approach (i.e. without attempting to fit the data to pre-existing coding schemes or analytic assumptions of the researcher). Thematic analysis was considered an appropriate method because it sits comfortably within a critical realist paradigm, allowing the researcher to acknowledge the way individuals made sense of their experiences, while recognising the broader social context that influence those meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) published guidelines on coding and theme development, which have been outlined in *Figure 2*.

Appendix E provides an example of an interview transcript and coding categories to illustrate the development of themes.

Figure 2

The Six Phases of Thematic Analysis, from Braun and Clarke (2006)



3.10. Research Quality

The quality of research relies on whether findings can be demonstrated as being reliable, valid and generalisable (Robson & McCartan, 2016). These factors present differently within quantitative and qualitative research.

Reliability

In quantitative research, reliability is concerned with whether results are replicable, consistent and stable over time (Bryman, 2012). In the current study, the impact of social bias was reduced by minimising the number of psychologically sensitive questions and reminding participants that responses would remain

anonymous and confidential (Mertens, 2010). Questionnaire findings were triangulated with responses from qualitative data to promote reliability (Olsen, 2004). In qualitative research, reliability is about whether methods used to collect and analyse data are consistent, dependable and trustworthy (Willig, 2013). To promote reliability, pitfalls were identified and mitigated against: recording devices were tested and checked ahead of time; environmental distractions were reduced by encouraging participants to select a time/date convenient for them; and by transcribing interviews personally, transcription errors were reduced (Easton et al., 2000).

Validity

In quantitative and qualitative research, validity examines the integrity of findings and conclusions, and the extent to which the research describes, measures and explains the phenomenon it intends to (Bryman, 2012). To improve the content and construct validity of questionnaires, piloting was used to ensure questions were clear, unambiguous and obtained valid information (Mertens, 2010). In qualitative research, threats to validity can occur when describing, interpreting or theorising about data (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Strategies used to promote validity included: *triangulation* (using multiple sources of data, methodological approaches or interpretative theories); *double-coding qualitative data* (cross-checking coded data with a group of trainee EPs during research supervision); *negative case analysis* (searching for and including instances that disconfirm initial theories to help develop a more well-rounded analysis); and *audit trails* (keeping a clear and transparent record of research activities).

Reflexivity is another factor that can impact on the validity of research. Reflexivity involves acknowledging one's own position within the research and

research context, including a self-reflection of one's own biases, preferences, preconceptions and assumptions (Dodgson, 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Reflexivity is a continual process of engaging with, challenging and acknowledging the social and cultural influences that can impact the context of the research (Barrett et al., 2020). To promote a reflexive approach, it is therefore important to acknowledge how my role as a trainee EP may have shaped my interaction with the data and the conclusions drawn. My work in schools alongside DTs and CLA, combined with previous research I had undertaken in this area of study, has meant that I went into this research with pre-existing conceptions and ideas about some of the responsibilities and challenges faced by DTs (for example, the difficulties associated with working within and between education and social care systems). This may have impacted how data was collected and interpreted, however, to mitigate against any unconscious bias that may have impacted on the quality of the research, active steps were taken to maintain transparency through reflective supervision with supervisors and peers, and the triangulation of findings to challenge implicit assumptions.

Generalisability

Generalisability refers to the extent that findings can be applied to other contexts or individuals who were not part of the research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). A distinction can be made between *internal* and *external* generalisability: conclusions made *within* the setting being studied versus generalisability *beyond* that setting (Maxwell, 1992). Within a critical realist paradigm, it may be possible to generalise beyond the current research if the underlying mechanisms impacting DT roles and the context in which they operate are clearly evidenced (Robson & McCartan, 2016). To mitigate against generalisability issues, transparency around the sampling process,

procedure and characteristics of participants will be maintained, as well as keeping clear and accurate records relating to data collection and analysis.

3.11. Ethical and Professional Issues

The ethics in this study were governed by the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2018) and subject to the UCL Institute of Education's ethical approval procedure. First, a data protection number was obtained, in accordance with the May 2018 General Data Protection Regulations, then ethical approval was sought via the UCL Department of Ethics Committee (see *Appendix F*).

Informed Consent

Participants provided fully informed consent. The participant information sheet and consent form contained details about the right to withdraw, including information about omitting interview or survey questions (see *Appendix G*). Participants had the option to exit the online survey or interview at any point and were informed that all unprocessed data would be destroyed if they chose to withdraw. The ethics of informed consent were observed in practice by ensuring that incomplete survey responses were not included in the final analysis, as it was not possible to determine whether individuals who left the survey wanted their data included or not.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

With consent, interviews were recorded for transcription, and deleted after transcription. Any identifying information (such as names, school, borough) were removed from responses, making all data anonymous, and pseudonyms were used. Participants' contact details (for arranging interviews and disseminating findings) were stored in separate, password protected file locations and will be destroyed after final dissemination. Consent is stored in a separate location from linked data, with the same

regard to the confidentiality and anonymity protocols. As the author was arranging, undertaking, and transcribing interviews, complete anonymity was not possible as the author was aware of participants' identities. However, the above measures were taken to ensure information was kept securely. The ethics of confidentiality and anonymity were observed in practice during interviews, where designated teachers were often responding to questions in the context of a busy school. During interviews, participants were regularly reminded that they could pause and resume the interview at any point (e.g. if a student or member of staff entered the room).

Debriefing

Participants were debriefed at the end of the interview. Although participants should not have experienced any significant harm discussing the topic, I was aware of the emotional impact the designated teacher role can have, which may have caused feelings of discomfort or distress. Steps were taken to minimise any risk to participants before interviews took place, such as having a self-selecting sample and reminding participants of their right to opt out of questions and withdraw; during the debriefing process, participants were reminded of their rights to withdraw and were given the author's contact details if they had any further questions.

Data Storage

The recorder used was stored securely; once interviews were transcribed, recordings were deleted. Transcription files were stored on a password protected laptop in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy. All data was anonymised and coded to prevent any personal information revealing participants' identities.

Dissemination

Following submission, a summary of findings will be disseminated to all participants who expressed interest. The research may be submitted for publication to contribute to the growing body of literature on the role and experiences of DTs.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. Overview

This chapter presents findings from surveys with virtual schools and DTs, followed by findings from DT interviews. Survey and interview data will be presented separately, then discussed jointly in Chapter 5.

Questionnaires were used to begin exploration of research questions. Responses highlighted initial themes and shared experiences that were explored in greater depth during interviews. Virtual schools and DTs completed separate questionnaires (see *Appendix C*) and findings are presented separately below.

4.2. Virtual School Survey Findings

Questionnaires for virtual school staff (n=44) explored information about the size and structure of virtual schools, support provided, and perceptions about the role of DTs. Preliminary analysis of virtual school responses showed wide variability in the local context. Total numbers of CLA on roll ranged from 100 to over 1000. Additionally, the size of virtual schools varied depending on the number of CLA within their county, ranging from 2 to 30 members of staff ($M = 10.95$ staff, $SD = 6.43$); the total number of DTs in each county ranged from 0 to 1000. Virtual schools also varied in their structural location within authorities; over half (52%; n=23) were positioned within Education, approximately 16% within Social Care (n=7), and the remainder within or between Education and Social Care.

Support Provided by Virtual Schools

Virtual schools offered a range of support to DTs and wider stakeholders (see *Table 14* in *Appendix H*). Training opportunities were cited by 86% of participants

(n=38) and commonly included training on the role and responsibilities of DTs, PEP process and procedure, attachment theory, and the impact of trauma.

General advice and guidance were referenced by over half of virtual schools (n=26; 59%), which included general availability over email, telephone, or in-person to answer questions, offer support, or signpost to wider agencies. This included dedicated time for DTs and social workers to contact virtual schools for information and advice (e.g. through virtual school surgeries or supervision).

Networking opportunities and forums were cited by over half of participants (n=25; 57%). This included opportunities for DTs, parents/carers and social workers to network, share good practice and discuss challenges. Other examples included termly DT forums/network meetings, or more informal coffee mornings providing opportunities to connect and collaborate.

Additional areas of support included annual conferences, the provision of additional resources (e.g. newsletters, updates, virtual school websites, guidance documents), specific support during PEPs, and coordinating provision for individual pupils (e.g. 1:1 tuition). Finally, quality assurance through annual meetings with headteachers and Ofsted, or termly meetings with DTs to monitor progress were referenced, as well as additional funding for specific children or specialist services that may not be covered by PP+ funding.

Virtual schools reported a range of additional support or services that they would like to offer DTs in the future. Common examples included further training opportunities, particularly around attachment-awareness and trauma-informed approaches. Other key areas of support have been outlined in *Table 5*.

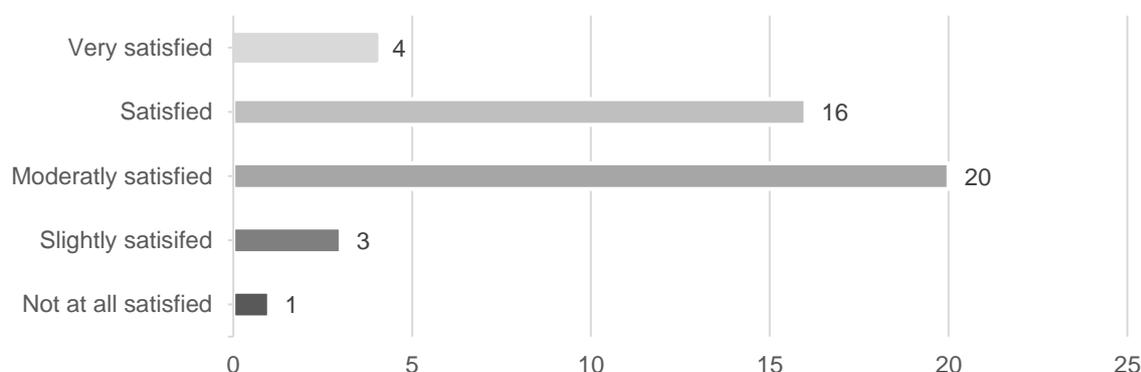
Table 5
Examples of Support That Virtual Schools Would Like to Offer

Key area of support	Frequency (%)
Further training opportunities	16 (36%)
Supervision for DTs	5 (11%)
Greater links with wider services and more joined up working	4 (9%)
Specific support and interventions for CLA	4 (9%)
Increasing virtual school presence during PEPs	3 (7%)
Raising the profile of CLA and attachment or trauma-informed approaches	3 (7%)
Increasing DT attendance and engagement in training/networking	3 (7%)
More networking opportunities for DTs	2 (5%)
Increasing awareness about the DT role	1 (2%)

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Almost half of virtual school staff (45%; n=20) were ‘moderately satisfied’ with the number of DTs that currently engaged with services, training or support offered by virtual schools. See *Figure 3*.

Figure 3
Virtual Schools’ Satisfaction with The Number of DTs That Engaged with Support or Training



Support from EPs and Wider Agencies

Three-quarters of virtual schools (75%; n=33) commissioned work from EP Services. Most common areas of input included delivering training, undertaking assessment, and facilitating consultation. Other areas of support included general advice or strategies, systemic work, supervision and delivering intervention. For details, see *Table 15* in *Appendix H*.

Over half (52%; n=23) of virtual schools commissioned work from additional services, including: Speech and Language Therapy, health services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Youth Support Services, Youth Justice workers, counselling services, specific therapeutic interventions, Alternative Provision (e.g. Forest Schools), targeted education support, Occupational Therapy, one-to-one tuition, specialist training and specialist teachers.

Perceptions on Key Challenges Faced by Designated Teachers

Key challenges that virtual schools perceived that DTs faced in their role were organised into four themes (see *Table 16 in Appendix H*). The most frequently mentioned challenge related to *DTs' workload and position in school*, which included a lack of time for DTs to devote to the role (e.g. time to attend training, prepare for PEPs and enact duties). This included concerns about DTs having a lack of seniority or influence in schools to enact change, and high workloads which could reduce capacity to meet CLA's needs.

Understanding the needs of CLA and how to support them in school was another identified challenge. Participants expressed that DTs' varying levels of experience, knowledge and understanding about care-experienced children could impact on how children were supported. Understanding and support for CLA could be influenced by children's individual levels of need and the number of care-experienced children in schools. The quality of the relationship between DTs and students, and barriers around using funding meaningfully were also included within this theme.

Subsequently, several virtual school participants reported that the level of *understanding and awareness about the DT role* was another challenge. This theme explored a perceived lack of understanding and support from school staff about the

DT role, and difficulties implementing attachment-aware or trauma-informed strategies. This included a lack of support from senior leaders.

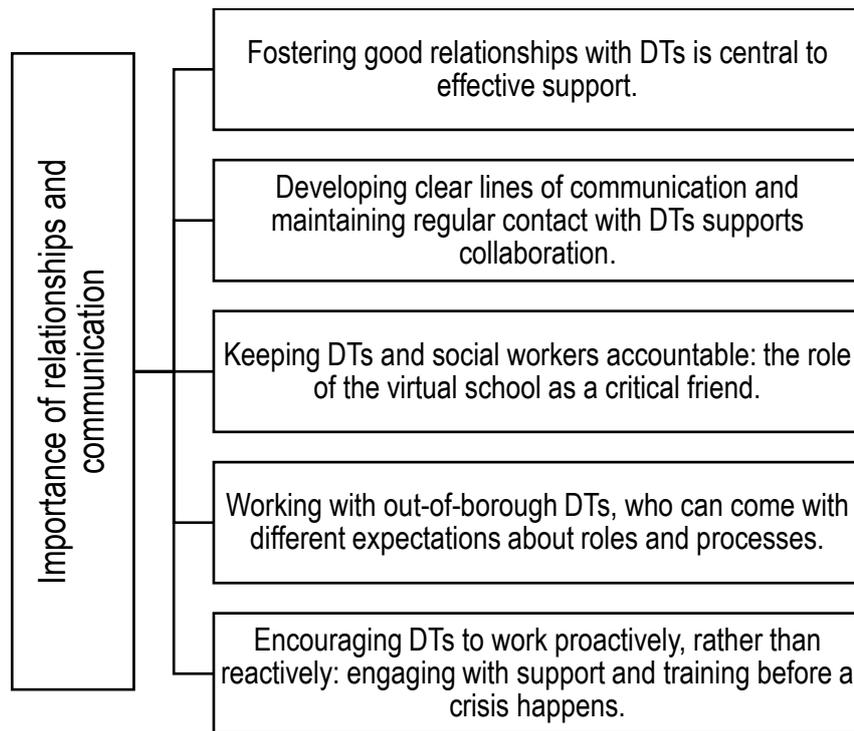
Finally, *systemic challenges* were identified by a smaller number of virtual schools, which included difficulties around multiagency working, a lack of standardisation in process and procedure between counties that impacted consistency, and a lack of attachment-aware or trauma-informed policies in schools.

Relationships and Communication with Designated Teachers

The final open question asked virtual schools to outline any other comments about how they worked with and supported DTs, and an additional theme was identified: *the importance of relationships and communication* (see *Figure 4*). Many virtual schools (61%; n=27) highlighted the importance of relationships and communication between virtual schools and DTs, particularly around fostering good relationships and developing clear lines of communication to support collaboration. This included maintaining regular contact with DTs and being available to support. This could be more challenging when working with DTs from other authorities, who often came with different expectations about roles and processes. Several virtual schools emphasised their role as a 'critical friend' for DTs and social workers - providing support, while also keeping others accountable for enacting their duties. Finally, several virtual schools expressed that fostering relationships and clear communication were important for enabling DTs to work proactively over reactively; instead of coming to virtual schools when an issue arose, accessing support in advance that may prevent situations from reaching a crisis point.

Figure 4

Virtual Schools' Perceptions on Relationships and Communication: Subthemes



4.3. Designated Teacher Survey Findings

Questionnaires for DTs (n=142) were divided into five sections: contextual questions about school settings; details about participants' roles in school; types of provision and support offered to care-experienced children; experiences as a DT, including key responsibilities and challenges; and experiences working with other professionals.

School Population

As outlined in the methodology chapter, DTs were based in schools from across England, and their education settings ranged broadly from early years to further education. Participants worked in a range of education settings, split broadly into two groups: mainstream (77%; n=109) and specialist settings (23%; n=33). See *Tables 1, 2 and 3*.

The size of participants' schools varied, ranging from 5 to 360 members of staff ($M = 70.0$ staff, $SD = 60.89$). The number of pupils on roll ranged from 5 to 2200 pupils ($M = 492.0$ pupils, $SD = 479.97$). The number of care-experienced children on roll ranged from 0 to 42 ($M = 9.0$ students, $SD = 7.44$).

In England, approximately 67 per 10,000 children are in care; additionally, in the year ending 31 March 2020, approximately 27 per 10,000 children ceased to be looked after or were adopted¹ (DfE, 2020). These figures provide an estimate of the proportion of care-experienced children in schools as just under 1% of the pupil population. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, more than 1% of care-experienced children on roll was considered above national average.

One-quarter of participants (26%; $n=37$) reported having fewer than 1% of care-experienced children in their schools; the remaining three-quarters of participants (74%; $n=105$) reported having *more* than the national average, suggesting that those DTs with higher proportions of care-experienced children may have been more likely to take part in the survey.

Of those that reported having more than 1% of care-experienced children in their schools, participants from mainstream settings ($n=109$) had between 1-10% on roll; whereas those from specialist settings ($n=33$) had between 1-100% of care-experienced children on roll (as several participants were based in specialist residential settings specifically for CLA). See *Figures 5 and 6*.

¹ This estimate is based on DfE (2020) data and does not account for the total number of previously looked after children - only those for the year ending 31 March 2020. National statistics on previously looked after children are not currently reported by the DfE.

Figure 5

Proportion of Care-Experienced Children in Mainstream Settings (n=109)

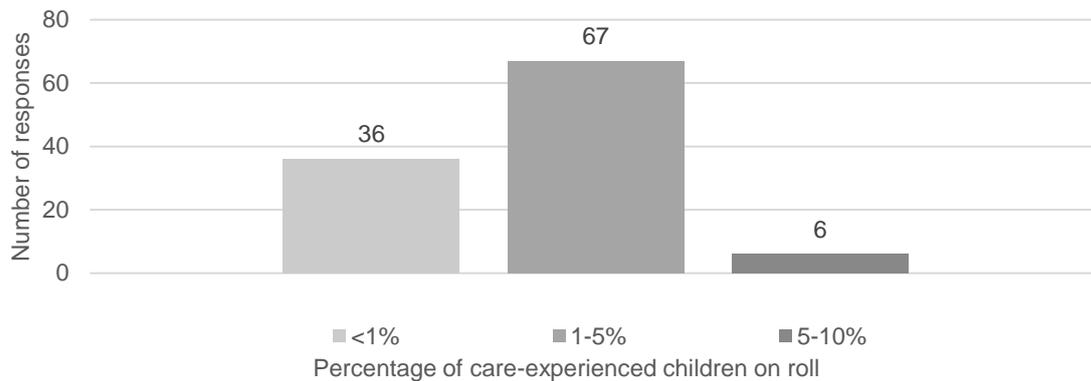
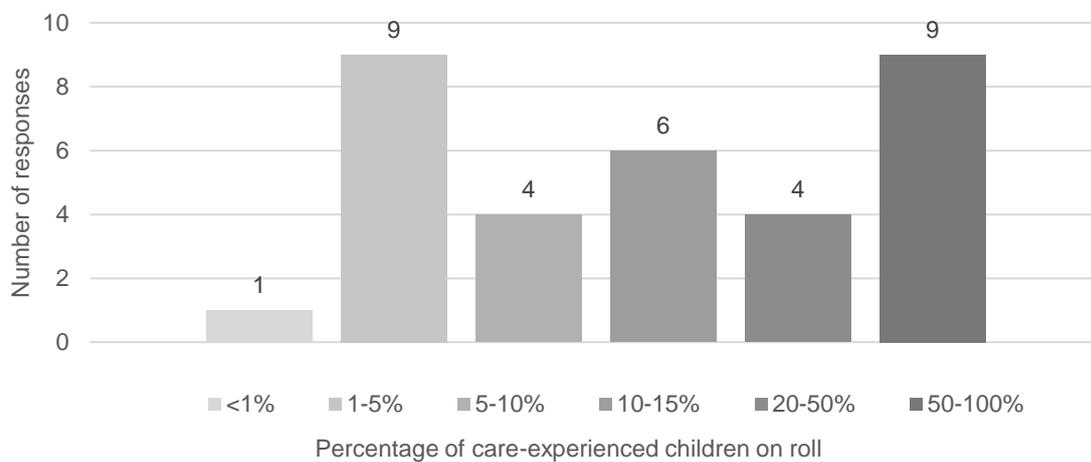


Figure 6

Proportion of Care-Experienced Children in Specialist Settings (n=33)



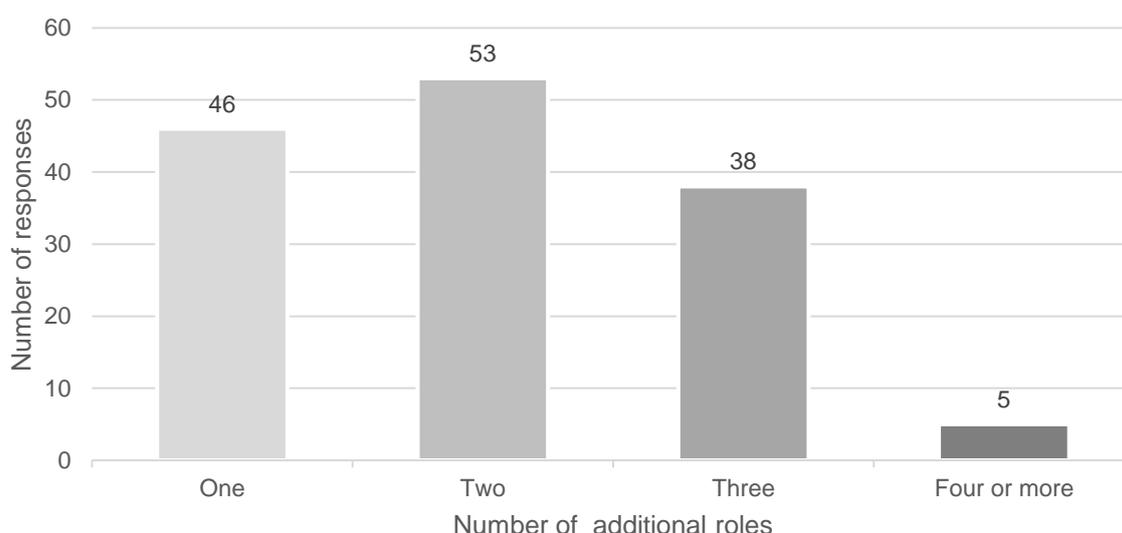
Designated Teacher Details

Participants' **experience** as DTs ranged from 2 months to 30 years ($M = 5.25$ years, $SD = 4.42$). Fourteen (10%) had been in the role before it became statutory in 2009, while most participants (90%; $n=128$) had taken up the role in the years following its statutory footing.

Approximately three-quarters of participants (73%; $n=103$) were full-time members of teaching staff and one-quarter (27%; $n=39$) were part-time or non-teaching staff. Eighty-two percent of participants ($n=117$) held a **leadership role** in the school, while the remainder were not part of senior leadership teams (18%; $n=25$).

On top of their DT role, all participants held a minimum of one additional role in their school, with the vast majority (96%; n=137) holding between 1-3 **additional roles** ($M = 2.0$ roles, $SD = 0.92$). See *Figure 7*.

Figure 7
Number of Additional Roles Held by DTs



The additional roles held by DTs varied. Over half of DTs were headteachers, deputy or assistant heads (59%; n=84), followed closely by DSL's (57%; n=81). Just under half of DTs were SENCOs or Inclusion Managers (43%; n=61). See *Table 6*.

Table 6
Additional Titles Held by DTs

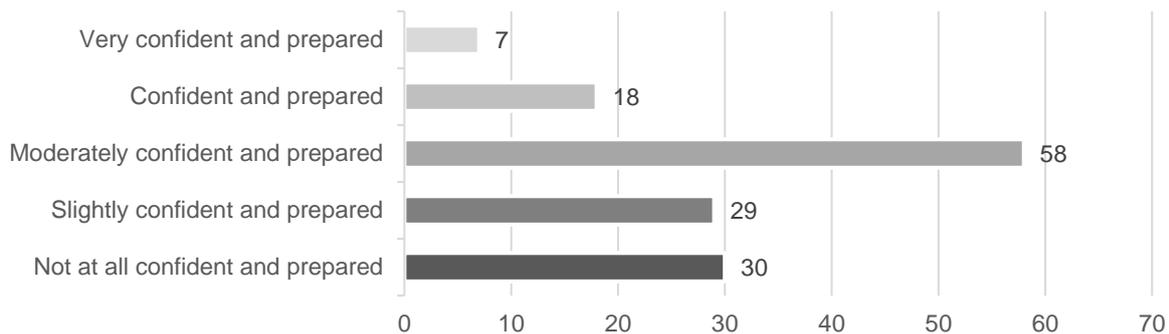
Role	Frequency	Percentage
Headteacher, Deputy Head or Assistant Head	84	59%
Designated Safeguarding Lead	81	57%
SENCO or Inclusion Manager	61	43%
Class or subject teacher	35	25%
Other*	20	14%
Head of Year	8	6%

Note. Most participants held multiple titles.

*Other role titles varied widely and included advisory teacher, tutor, behaviour lead, strategic lead, family support worker, exam coordinator, pastoral lead or mental health lead.

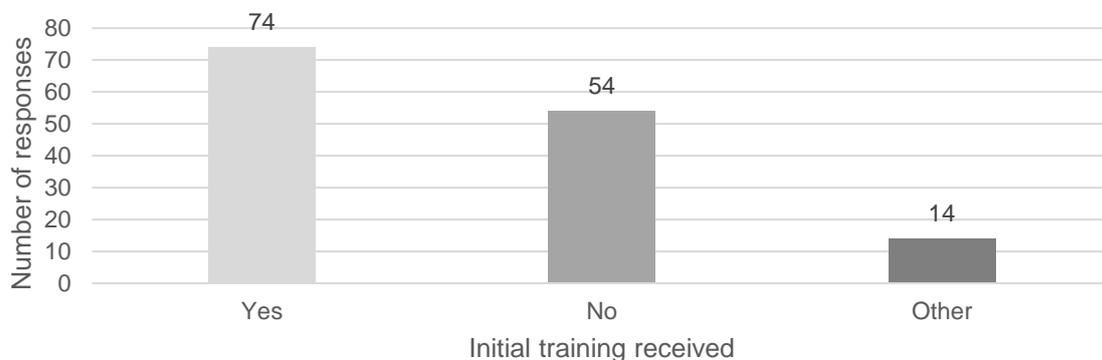
When asked how **confident and prepared** they felt when they first took up the role, the most frequent response was 'moderately' (41%; n=58), however one-fifth of participants (n=30) expressed that they were 'not at all' confident and prepared when they began the role (see *Figure 8*).

Figure 8
How Confident and Prepared DTs Felt When They Took Up the Role



Over half of participants (52%; n=74) indicated that they received **initial training** when they started as DTs, however 38% (n=54) had not (see *Figure 9*)². A smaller proportion of all participants (10%; n=14) indicated that they received some form of training on the job, however several expressed that opportunities were either limited, or they had to seek them out themselves.

Figure 9
Proportion of DTs that Received Initial Training



² Of those participants who started the role after training became a statutory requirement (n=128), similar results were observed: 52% (n=66) received initial training, while 38% (n=48) had not.

Time Spent Enacting Duties

Most participants indicated that, in a typical week, the amount of time dedicated to their DT role was less than one day a week (58%; n=82). See *Table 7*.

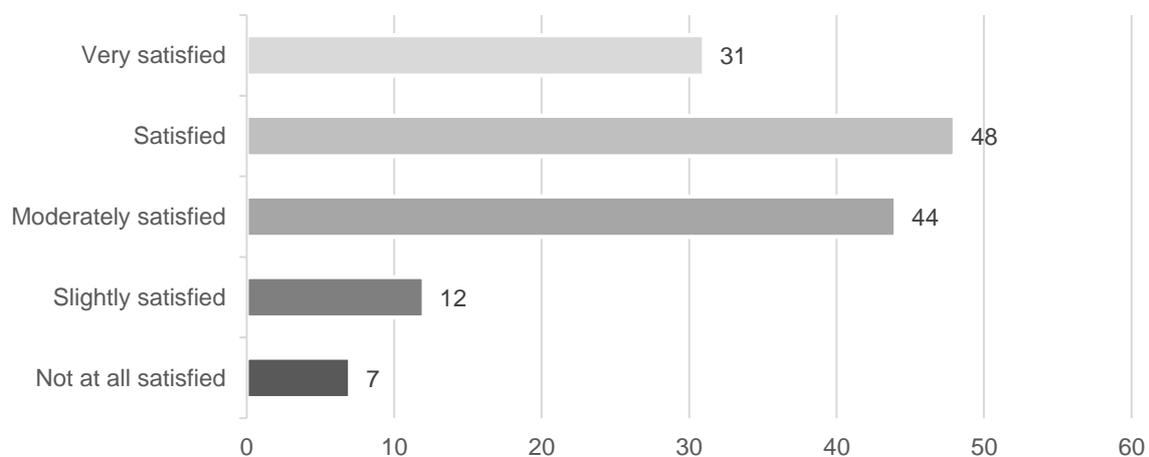
Table 7
Time in a Typical Week Participants Could Dedicate to their DT Role

Amount of time	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one day a week	82	58%
1-2 days per week	42	30%
2-3 days per week	11	8%
3-4 days per week	1	1%
4-5 days per week	6	4%
Total	142	100%

Note. Percentages add up to 101% due to rounding.

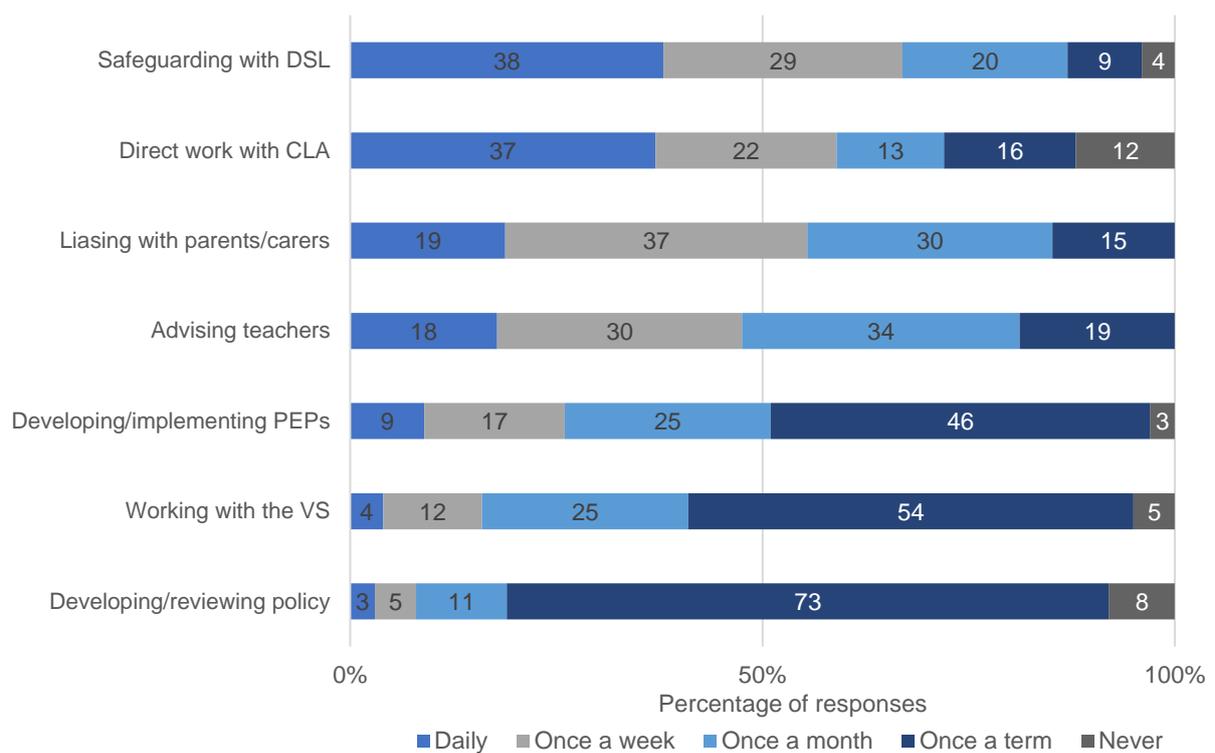
Over half of DTs (56%; n=79) reported that they were either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with ***the amount of time, resources or support*** they had to meet their duties; however, one-third (n=44) responded more neutrally with ‘moderately satisfied’ and 5% (n=7) were ‘not at all satisfied’. See *Figure 10*.

Figure 10
Designated Teachers’ Satisfaction with the Time, Resources or Support to Meet Duties



When asked to outline, over the course of a term, how much time they might dedicate to each part of their **statutory duties**, DTs provided a range of responses (see *Figure 11*). Statutory duties that most DTs thought they might enact *daily* included working with the DSL around any safeguarding concerns related to care-experienced children, and working directly with care-experienced children. The statutory duty most DTs thought they might enact on a *weekly* basis was liaising with parents/carers and guardians to promote good home-school links. Most DTs responded that they might advise teachers about how to support care-experienced children on a *monthly* basis (although a close percentage of participants felt this could happen on a weekly basis). Finally, the majority of DTs reported that on a *termly* basis they would develop and implement PEPs, work with the virtual school to promote children’s educational outcomes, and develop/review whole-school policy on how to support care-experienced children.

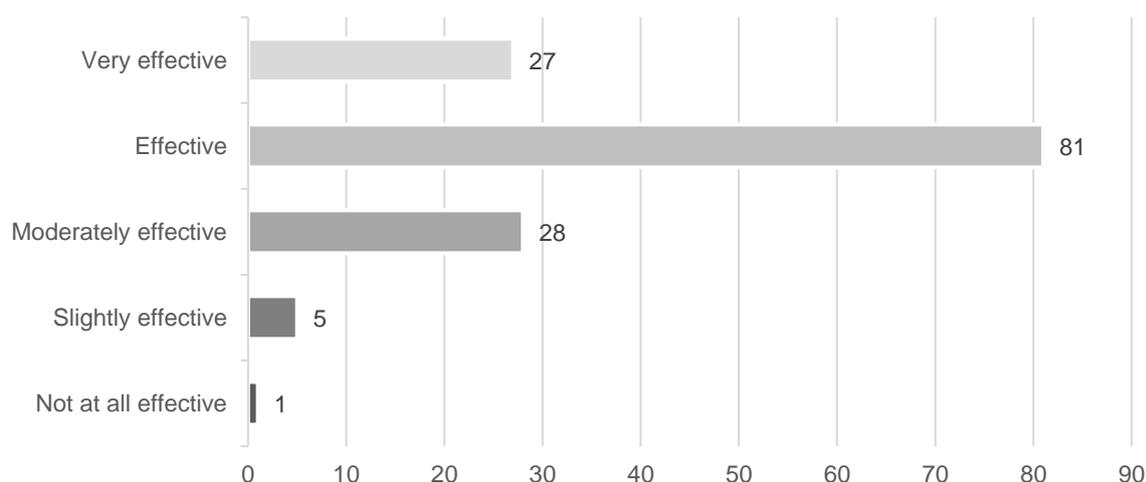
Figure 11
Time Spent Enacting Key Statutory Duties over a Term



Designated Teachers' Sense of Effectiveness

Three-quarters of participants responded that they felt 'effective' or 'very effective' in their DT role (n=108; 76%). See *Figure 12*.

Figure 12
How Effective DTs Felt in their Role



Examples of how DTs measured their **effectiveness** have been organised into five themes (see *Table 17* in *Appendix H*). First, *measuring progress and outcomes for CLA* were commonly referenced by DTs as a measure of their effectiveness. Academic outcomes included educational progress or improved attendance and engagement at school; while wellbeing outcomes included positive changes to children's social and emotional needs, peer relationships and personal development (e.g. feeling happy, confident, safe, settled or a sense of belonging).

DTs indicated that *receiving feedback* also helped them to recognise when they were enacting their role effectively. This included feedback from a range of stakeholders, including pupils, parents/carers, staff, virtual schools, and wider agencies. Feedback could be gathered during meetings, or more informally through conversations about the impact of support on care-experienced children. More formalised feedback in the form of quality assurance checks also helped DTs measure

their sense of effectiveness, which included quality assurance of PEP paperwork by virtual schools, annual audits with governors, or during line management reviews.

Connections with others were also used as a measure of effectiveness. Participants expressed that this could take two forms: by building relationships, and through collaboration and communication with others. Building relationships included developing strong connections with stakeholders, including, parents/carers, school staff and social workers. Clear lines of communication and collaboration included sharing information, attending multi-agency meetings, having PEPs attended by carers and professionals, and ensuring all changes or updates were communicated promptly.

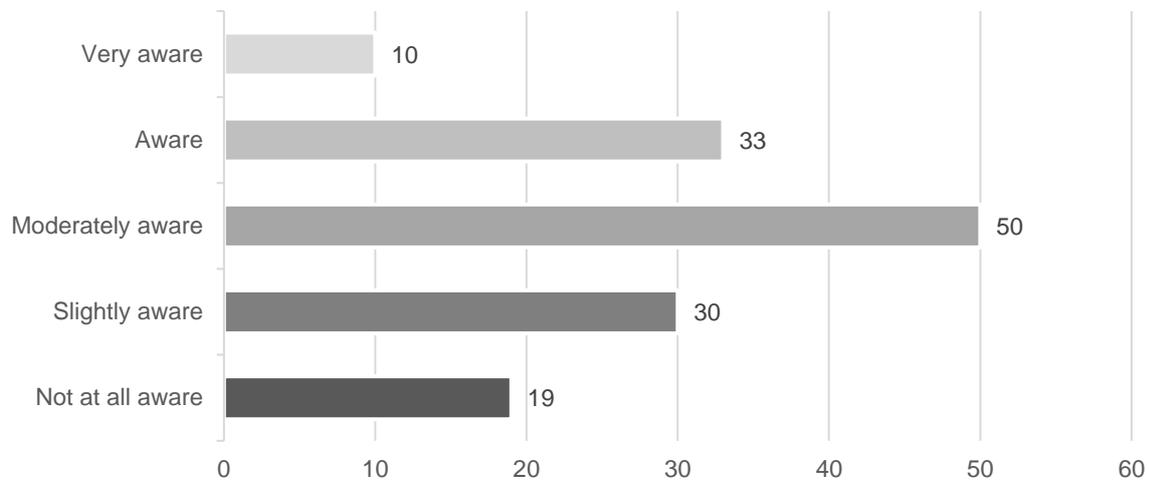
DTs expressed that *understanding and meeting children's needs* was another measure of their effectiveness. This referred to both DTs and school staff being able to identify the needs of care-experienced children and provide appropriate support and intervention. Alongside identifying children's needs and providing support, was the ability to *understand* the needs of care-experienced children (e.g. recognising the impact of trauma, having attachment-aware and trauma-informed approaches in schools, and considering the individual needs of care-experienced children across the school and by senior leaders).

Finally, *meeting statutory duties* was used as a measure of effectiveness and included DTs' abilities to complete administrative and operational tasks, meet deadlines and action PEP targets.

When participants were asked ***how well-informed other staff members were*** about their DT role, responses varied. Over one-third (35%; n=49) reported that staff were only 'slightly aware' or 'not at all aware' of what the role involved (see *Figure 13*).

Figure 13

Perceptions About How Well-Informed Other Staff Were About the DT Role



Key Challenges Faced by Designated Teachers

Key challenges that DTs faced in their role were organised into five themes (see *Table 18* in *Appendix H*). Participants identified *bureaucracy and administration* as one of the greatest challenges faced in their role. It is not uncommon for CLA to be placed in schools out-of-borough, depending on the location of their placement, and DTs explained that working with multiple LAs could be challenging as each had their own processes, procedures, and systems. This meant there was a lack of consistency and standardisation in how DTs enacted their duties, and on the expectations placed on them from different boroughs. As well as negotiating multiple systems, participants expressed that paperwork, process and procedure felt overly bureaucratic and were very time consuming. Some expressed that PEP paperwork felt like a 'tick box exercise' rather than a meaningful process, and participants from special schools reported that PEP forms were not always 'SEN-friendly' and there could be some duplication with EHCPs. Challenges around funding were also raised; this included concerns about inadequate funding (particularly for supporting children with SEMH needs), frustrations about funding applications, and challenges around using funding

meaningfully. One participant highlighted difficulties around identifying previously looked after children, as there are not currently any centralised systems or processes for monitoring who these children are.

Time and workload were identified as another key challenge. This highlighted a lack of time to enact the DT role effectively and managing workloads amid multiple responsibilities. Participants expressed the role could be time-intensive, particularly when there were higher numbers of CLA. Intensity of workload was also impacted by children's individual level of need.

Understanding and awareness about the needs of care-experienced children and the role of DTs was another identified challenge. This included managing the individual and unique needs of each child and understanding how best to support them. Difficulties around home placement (e.g. breakdown of placement, change of placement, relationships with carers) could also impact case complexity. Staff engagement and understanding about care-experienced children was also a challenge. Participants explained that staff were not always aware of children's backgrounds, or how to effectively use attachment-aware and trauma-informed approaches. Some participants found it difficult when staff did not engage proactively with PEP processes or feedback information to DTs promptly. Awareness and understanding about the DT role were also areas of challenge; participants explained that staff and senior leaders did not always recognise the role's function or importance. Additionally, managing expectations about school capacity could be challenging. This included managing expectations (particularly with social workers, virtual schools or parents/carers) about what schools could provide, offer and achieve. Some DTs expressed that schools were often expected to meet very complex needs with some children, which without support from wider services, could be difficult. Finally, several

participants felt there was not always enough support for DTs and examples included a lack of virtual school attendance during PEPs, as well as reference to the emotional impact of the role, yet a lack of supervision in schools.

Participants identified *multiagency working* as another key challenge. This included contact and communication with other agencies, and frustration when schools were not kept informed about changes. Working with social care could be challenging due to heavy caseloads and high turnover of staff, which impacted consistency and contact with social workers. It could be also challenging to access services and support for care-experienced children, such as mental health services and therapeutic interventions. Several participants expressed that it could be difficult to know what support was out there without clear links or joined-up working.

Finally, several DTs referred to the current challenge of working in *unprecedented times* regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants explained that Covid-19 had prevented face-to-face support and new initiatives being implemented; this made it difficult to ensure the safety of staff, children, and external visitors. Moreover, safeguarding concerns around attendance of some care-experienced children during lockdown periods were an additional challenge identified by one DT.

Perceptions Around Support That Could Improve the DT Role

When asked to consider what additional resources, support or training would make their role easier, DTs identified a range of ideas that were organised into four themes (see *Table 19* in *Appendix H*).

Support for DTs included factors to help with the day-to-day functioning of the role. More time was frequently mentioned, to enable DTs to enact their duties, attend training, and work directly with CLA. This was followed by having a reduced or shared

workload. More training about the DT role was also mentioned, which included training on writing PEPs, using different systems, supporting care-experienced children, and working effectively with different stakeholders. Networking and supervision opportunities were identified as another useful provision, to share experiences and resources and reflect on practice.

Support when working with wider stakeholders included greater collaboration, communication and joined up working with wider professionals (particularly virtual schools and social care), as well as a shared understanding about the roles, responsibilities, boundaries, and expectations of each stakeholder. Participants felt that more training and a greater understanding in schools about the needs of care-experienced children would be useful. This included more training for staff on attachment, trauma, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), case studies and support strategies. Several participants expressed that increased awareness and recognition about the DT role would be beneficial, including training for staff about how DTs worked with other stakeholders and giving the role greater status in school.

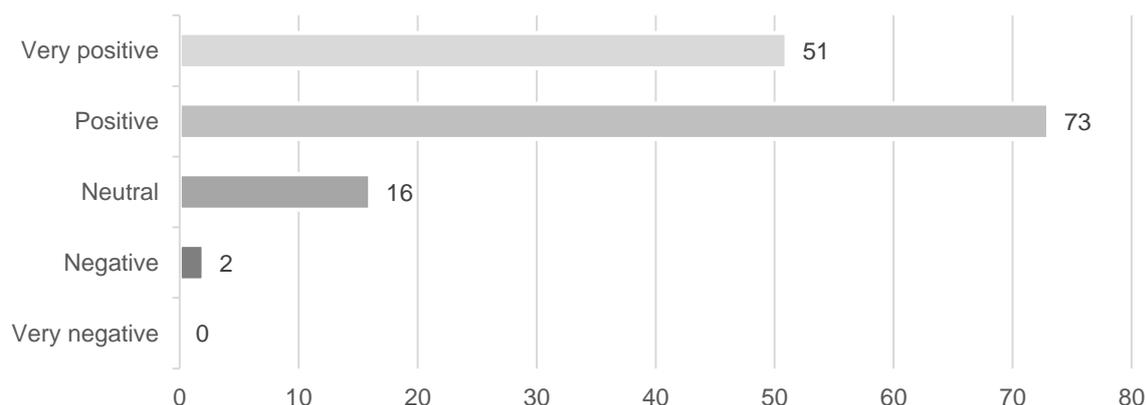
Support in the wider system was another area that could improve the DT role. This included greater consistency or standardisation between LAs, and less bureaucratic systems and processes. Several participants explained that a universal PEP form would be useful, rather than each county doing something different. Additionally, DTs expressed that greater consistency around role expectations and more clarity about how different LAs operated would be useful (e.g. what resources, support and provision were available in each borough). Participants expressed that revisions to paperwork could reduce time spent on administration and improve the information that was collected and presented (e.g. SEN-friendly documents suitable for SEN targets and curriculums, and greater recognition around wellbeing outcomes).

Support for care-experienced children was the final theme identified, including access to more funding, resources, and support. Examples included more guidance around how to use funding effectively, greater flexibility about how funding was used, more knowledge about what was available, and access to specific support such as CAMHs, specialist services and alternative provision.

Working with Other Professionals

Virtual Schools. Over three-quarters of DTs (87%; n=124) reported either a 'positive' or 'very positive' experience working with virtual schools (see *Figure 14*).

Figure 14
Designated Teachers' Experiences Around Working with Virtual Schools



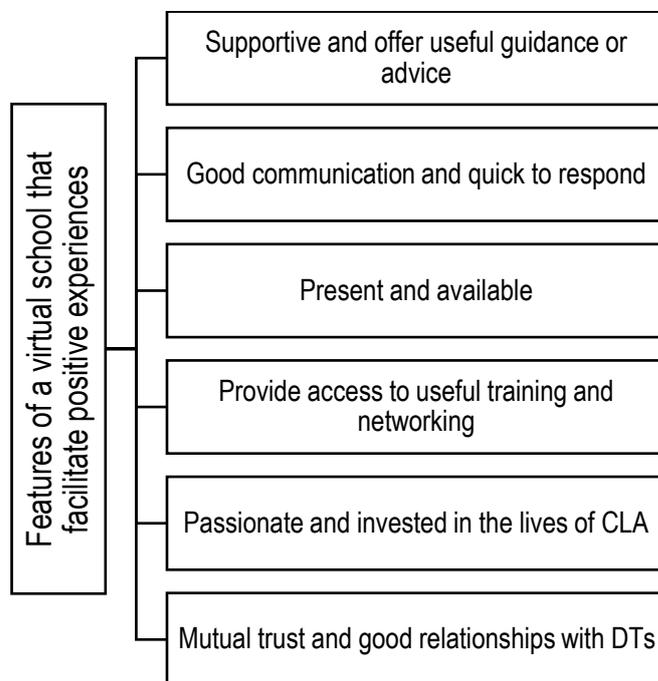
Six key features (subthemes) that helped define positive experiences when working with virtual schools were recorded (see *Figure 15*). The most common characteristic, mentioned by approximately two-thirds of DTs, was a *supportive* virtual school who were willing to help, were approachable, proactive, knowledgeable, and offered useful support, guidance and advice. *Good communication* with DTs was also valued, including virtual schools who were quick to respond to queries or provide feedback. Being *present and available* was another feature valued by participants, which included the physical presence of virtual school staff during PEPs, and being available by phone/email throughout the term. This was followed by *access to training*

and networking; participants valued having virtual schools that offered regular opportunities to develop their knowledge and meet with other DTs. Participants appreciated virtual schools who were *passionate and invested* in the lives of CLA. Finally, those virtual schools that had built *good relationships* with DTs helped to define a positive experience. This included regarding the virtual school as a ‘critical friend’ and having a sense of mutual trust.

Participants expressed that when these features were not demonstrated, it impacted on their experiences with virtual schools. Several DTs highlighted that, because they worked with multiple LAs, experiences with some virtual schools were better than others. Those that reported a neutral or negative experience expressed that this was due to a perceived lack of support, communication, or consistency.

Figure 15

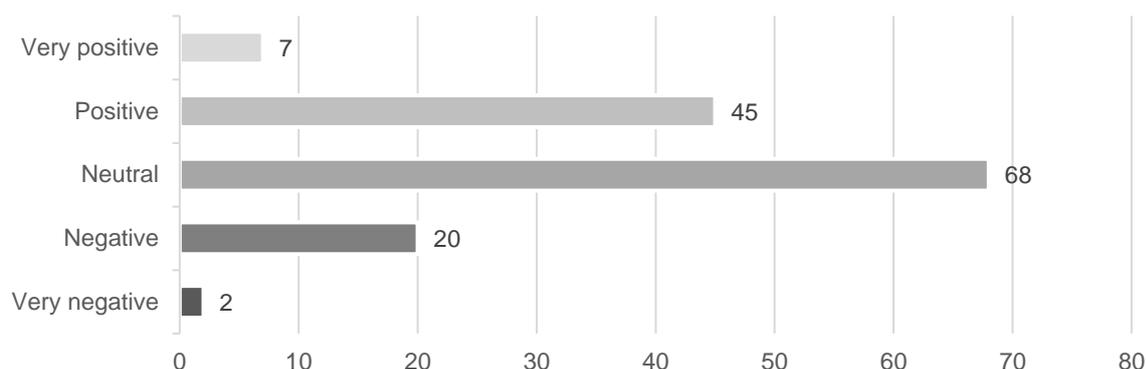
Six Features Used to Define Positive Experiences When Working with Virtual Schools



Social Care. Designated teachers had mixed experiences working with social care. ‘Neutral’ was the most common response (48%; n=68), however 15% (n=22) reported a ‘negative’ or ‘very negative’ experience (see *Figure 16*).

Figure 16

Designated Teachers' Experiences of Working with Social Care



Qualifying responses were summarised into four themes (see *Table 20* in *Appendix H*). First, DTs expressed that experiences were impacted by *capacity and resources within social care*. Participants who reported ‘neutral’ experiences often clarified their responses by explaining that experiences were very mixed due to high variability between social workers and different LAs: ‘some are better than others’.

Communication and contact between social care and schools also impacted DTs’ experiences. Communication and contact with social workers were very mixed, with numerous DTs expressing that it was challenging to contact social workers due to high caseloads and overcapacity. However, when communication was consistent, DTs reported that experiences greatly improved.

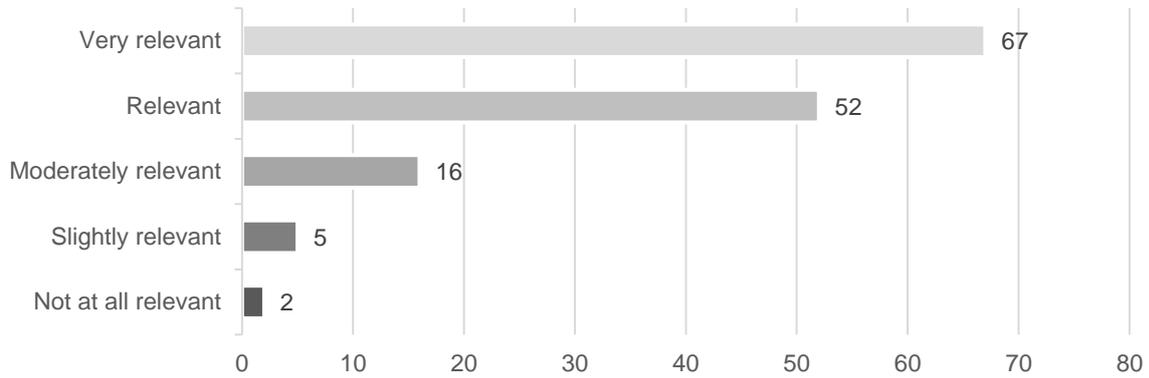
Similarly, *joined-up working between school and social care* had an impact on experiences. Participants expressed frustration when decisions were made by social care about CLA without talking to schools, or when social care placed unrealistic expectations on schools about support that could be implemented. Experiences

improved when social workers had a better understanding about school processes, when there was clarity around roles, and when school and care worked in partnership.

Finally, *consistency of care* was the final factor impacting on experiences with social care. Participants referred to frequent changes in social workers and high turnover which made it difficult for both children and schools to form links and build relationships with social workers. However, when social workers were consistent and connections were developed, DTs reported more positive experiences.

Educational Psychologists. Sixty-three percent of DTs (n=89) had worked with an EP in their role. Of those who had worked with EPs, consultation and assessment were the type of input/support most frequently mentioned (see *Table 21* in *Appendix H*). Consultation included advice, strategies or guidance provided by EPs around learning, wellbeing, or behaviour. This was followed by assessment, which largely referred to statutory assessments for EHCPs, but also included observation, cognitive/learning assessment, mental health assessment or exam access arrangements. Additional input/support included training for schools on attachment and trauma, interventions delivered to children/young people, and systemic support, such as helping develop attachment-aware behaviour policy or supporting schools with research. When asked how relevant DTs thought support from an EP would be, the vast majority (n=119) reported it was either 'relevant' (37%) or 'very relevant' (47%). See *Figure 17*. However, several participants mentioned that support from EPs would only be sought if there were concerns about the child's learning, which often fell under the SENCO role rather than their DT role.

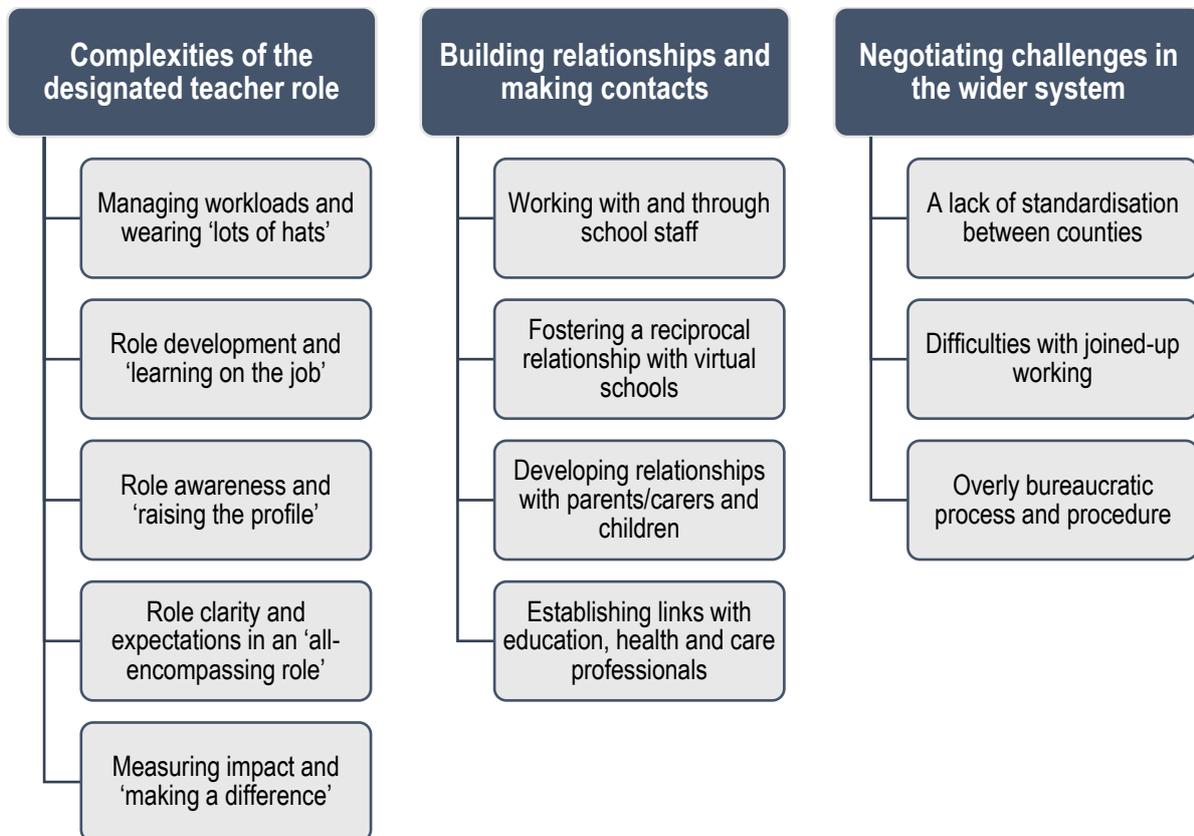
Figure 17
Perceptions from DTs About EP Relevance to Their Role



4.4. Interview Findings

Thematic analysis of interviews with DTs yielded three key themes: (1) complexities of the DT role; (2) building relationships and making contacts; and (3) negotiating challenges in the wider system (see *Figure 18*).

Figure 18
Designated Teachers' Experiences of their Role: Themes and Subthemes.



Theme 1: Complexities of the Designated Teacher Role

Managing Workloads and Wearing ‘Lots of Hats’. All participants reported holding multiple roles alongside their DT duties: ‘I wear lots of hats’ (DT14). Participants described a degree of crossover between the DT role and other responsibilities, particularly those who were SENCOs: ‘they are very similar - different paperwork, different meetings, but ultimately the target setting and the trying to meet the child's needs within mainstream classroom’ (DT11); and among those with safeguarding roles: ‘they are quite closely linked a lot of the time - probably because a lot of children have gone through the system through Section 14 or Section 47 before they were removed’ (DT10). Although multiple roles meant participants were managing multiple workloads, the crossover of responsibilities could provide DTs with a holistic understanding of children: ‘I know all the safeguarding, I know all of the SEN stuff, I know all of the looked after stuff - it's a one stop shop’ (DT15).

Participants expressed that the DT role was ‘time intensive’ (DT4), and their workload fluctuated depending on the number of CLA in school: ‘currently, I don't have any students, so you'd feel bad saying, okay that's my allotted time to be the DT ... whereas last year I had five ... so there's a huge amount of work to do’ (DT2). Participants explained that the number of CLA in school was difficult to predict, as children could be relocated with little notice: ‘it varies from year to year as to how many children we've got on roll that are looked after ... they go to a different foster home, sometimes the placements have broken down, so they move on quite quickly’ (DT9). As well as workload being impacted by the number of CLA, children's individual level of need also influenced how much time DTs needed to devote to their role: ‘we've got some very challenging looked after children in our school, and therefore the role is more time consuming. It requires more of me - they require more intervention’ (DT7).

Finally, participants emphasised that the DT role needed protected time to meet their duties effectively: 'in the positions where I was more successful it was because I had time set aside on the timetable when I could make the phone calls to chase up social workers, where I could meet the carers, where I could drop in and see the student' (DT1). However, many expressed that they were not given a specific amount of time for the role but were expected to fulfil their DT duties around other responsibilities: 'it's almost an additional role to squeeze in where you can. I think what's really hard is the lack of time, and the recognition that it can take a huge amount of additional time on top of your normal workload' (DT2). Some DTs reflected that there was not enough acknowledgement, both locally and nationally, about the amount of time or support needed to truly promote outcomes for care-experienced children: 'the capacity you need in your workforce to manage a looked after child is huge, and unfortunately, it's not something that schools have recognised - not something the government have recognised' (DT10). Ultimately, participants expressed a desire for more time to enact the role effectively: 'I think there really should be more time afforded to DTs ... the role, if it's done properly, requires time and attention' (DT6).

Role Development and 'Learning on the Job'. Rather than actively applying to become a DT, many participants described acquiring or absorbing the job as part of an additional role or internal promotion: 'I sort of inherited it when I took on the SENCO role' (DT9). Although, a smaller number of participants expressed that they had actively chosen to apply for the role, often driven by a personal interest in the area: 'when it was advertised, I immediately went for it ... I thought, it's the perfect role for me' (DT6). Some DTs reported that the role had been an unexpected add-on to their duties: 'it appeared on my job description ... I said, "look, I actually don't know what this means. What is the designated teacher?"' (DT14); which meant that many

went into the role without knowing what was expected of them: 'when I became assistant headteacher, that was one of the things that I took over ... I didn't have any real idea of what I was doing, what I was supposed to do' (DT12).

While some DTs reported receiving initial training about their duties: 'they had specific training for people who have newly taken on the role ... I went on that straightaway' (DT2); training experiences varied, and the content did not always meet participants' expectations: 'I've done online training ... it was very generic' (DT15). In contrast, several participants expressed that they had not received any formal training before taking on the role, learning experientially instead: 'there's not been any training ... I'm learning on the job as each child comes through' (DT3). This meant that DTs could sometimes experience a trying introduction to their role: 'it was a very quick handover ... it was a bit of a baptism of fire' (DT4); and described having to learn through trial and error: 'it's all been a process of elimination, really - working things out, making sure I've got the right training, making sure I'm doing the right thing' (DT12). As a result, participants explained that they often had to develop their own understanding of the role as they went: 'nobody really explains to you exactly what you've got to do, or how to do it. I've learned from what the person before me knew ... I was just pushed into my role expecting to know what to do at each point (DT7).

Participants that were able to access networking opportunities expressed that meeting other DTs could help deepen their understanding of the role: '[it's] quite useful to hear from other DTs who are doing the role and about the struggles that they faced ... without that, I would have had no idea what I was meant to be doing and what the role entailed' (DT9). However, not all DTs had access to networking: 'we don't have a network or anything like that' (DT3); and some found these meetings more helpful than

others: 'we do have a group that I was made aware of ... I think some people get more out of it than me' (DT5).

Role Awareness and 'Raising the Profile'. Participants expressed that there seemed to be a general lack of awareness about the DT role: 'I don't think that the word "designated teacher" means much to many people' (DT7). Participants experienced this lack of awareness from other colleagues at school: 'I don't think a lot of teachers know anything about the role' (DT9); as well as from DTs themselves: 'when I came into the school, I wasn't really aware that that role existed' (DT6). Moreover, some expressed that care-experienced students did not always understand the role either: 'the children themselves, depending on the age, sometimes don't know what I'm there for' (DT4). Because the population of CLA is relatively small, some participants felt the role was less visible as it was such a unique position: 'it's quite a niche area, and because there's only one in each school it's very different from anything else' (DT10); while others expressed that there seemed to be a general lack of awareness about the provision or support available for CLA, which extended to the DT role: 'there's not a great understanding of what is put in place for those children, and so therefore, what that role includes' (DT13).

As well as a perceived lack of awareness about the role, participants expressed that the role lacked status or recognition in schools: 'it just doesn't have that kind of high-level profile' (DT3); as well as a perceived lack of value or worth: 'it's not seen as an important role' (DT15). This could lead to misconceptions about the significance or purpose of the DT role: 'a lot of people just think it's an administration role, and I feel that there's far more value to that' (DT2). When reflecting on the status of DTs, one participant described that DTs did not seem to feature highly in the school hierarchy: 'in the pecking order of headteachers and assistant headteachers and DSLs and

SENCOs, I don't think it has a huge amount of weight or meaning for a lot of people' (DT7). Others expressed a desire for greater authority and influence in the school to effectively enact change: 'I think that they need a bit more autonomy to be able to actually be proper student advocates and to implement things swiftly' (DT6). Several participants felt that 'raising the profile' (DT6) of DTs was ultimately important for supporting outcomes for CLA: 'I would fight for the DT role to be more important than it is, because when you look at the effect it has on individual children, in individual circumstances, it can be the one thing that keeps them going' (DT10).

Additionally, DTs expressed that their role seemed to lack status or influence when working with professionals outside education and during decision-making processes: 'I don't feel that I'm ever really listened to by social care' (DT2). Participants explained that, although social workers were perceived as having wider care responsibilities for CLA, DTs had more direct contact with the students: 'yes, their social worker is the overall charge of everything about them, but it's me that sees them' (DT7). Some felt their insight and understanding about CLA should be taken into greater consideration by social care: 'they need to actually make more use of the DT as someone who knows quite a lot about the student, both in terms of how the student's doing now, but also in terms of the student's aspirations and where they want to go' (DT1).

Role Clarity and Expectations in an 'All-Encompassing Role'. When describing their experiences, DTs often expressed having an 'all-encompassing role' (DT7) with a wide-ranging remit: 'I think there is a plethora of different roles I feel like I have at different times' (DT2). Yet, initial expectations about the DT role often varied between participants. While some had anticipated the role to be more clerical: 'I thought it would be more of an administrative role, where it was more about keeping

track of the children' (DT3); others had expected less paperwork and more direct contact with students: 'I expected the role to be slightly less bureaucratic and more like mentoring these kids' (DT6). Ultimately, many expressed the role was more physically and emotionally demanding than originally expected: 'it's certainly more challenging and more time consuming than I ever thought it would be' (DT7).

When asked about their key responsibilities, participants expressed that a central part of their role involved having oversight of PEPs: 'the most important thing is being the individual who's responsible for the setting up, planning, executing and delivering the PEPs termly' (DT6). This included tracking and monitoring children's academic and emotional progress, and the impact of intervention and support: 'I check that they're making progress in their classes, check that they're making progress against assessments, check their attendance ... we need to make sure that they're making educational progress, but also that their wellbeing needs are met too' (DT13). Participants expressed that their role involved acting as the key liaison between home and school: 'I tend to be the main person that the carers would contact. I tend to be the person that the staff would contact in the first instance, if they had a concern' (DT12); as well as between school and wider agencies: 'I'm responsible for liaising with virtual schools, with the social worker, with the foster carers, with the parents and obviously, with the child. It's quite a wide-ranging remit' (DT10).

Additionally, DTs explained that they were advocates for care-experienced children: 'you need to be able to be their champions ... you need to be able to stand up and fight their battles for them' (DT16). This included being available: 'my role is to make myself known to the children in school, so they know why I'm here and what I'm here for' (DT4); and helping others to empathise and recognise the impact of attachment and trauma on development: 'you just want other people to appreciate

what the students are going through - some of the trauma they've experienced. And you're just trying to get people to recognise that' (DT2). Participant expressed that, although they were not always the member of staff working directly with the children: 'I don't necessarily do day-to-day work with them' (DT8); they would champion students by having oversight of their care and support: 'even if I can't be on the ground with them all the time, I can still be an advocate and push for those things which are needed' (DT2).

Finally, DTs reported that their role included previously looked after children, however there was a sense of uncertainty about what the expectations were for supporting these students: 'it's an additional duty and expectation that was kind of sneaked in without there being very much notice or fanfare about it, and not really with very much clarity about what specifically is it that they're asking us to do' (DT1). Participants explained that it could be difficult to know which students were previously looked after because there was no centralised system for tracking and monitoring these children: 'not everybody tells you when they're post-looked after – especially when they're post-adoption' (DT8). While DTs felt that it was important that previously looked after children's needs were being recognised: 'just because a student goes from being looked after to getting an SGO and being formally looked after, doesn't mean that stuff disappears overnight' (DT6); participants expressed frustration that they had not been given additional time for their new responsibilities: 'I think it's really good that post-looked after children are now part of the deal, but nobody said, here's an extra day a week to manage those children' (DT10).

Measuring Impact and 'Making a Difference'. Participants had mixed responses when asked about how they measured their sense of effectiveness. Some DTs used performance data monitoring to assess their impact: 'you've got the basic

day-to-day things like looking at attendance and punctuality, looking at students' weekly reports in terms of their behaviour scores and their engagement scores, looking in terms of whether they're missing days, whether they're picking up fixed term exclusions or not' (DT1). Others expressed their sense of effectiveness came from seeing the child make academic progress: 'if they're engaging in education and they achieve grades which allow them to get on to their next stage of education, then for me, I've achieved my role as a DT' (DT12).

In addition, participants emphasised that their sense of effectiveness was influenced by children's social, emotional and wellbeing outcomes: 'if the child's making progress and gaining in confidence and happy to come to school and able to talk to adults to share concerns, making friends, and developing their social skills ... to me, it's about seeing the child succeeding' (DT9). Participants felt they were making a difference if they could help children feel accepted and part of the school community: 'you know you've done a good job when you give them that sense of belonging' (DT7); and if they felt they were advocating effectively for the child: 'for me the success would be making sure their voices are really heard' (DT2).

External feedback was another measure used by DTs to evaluate their sense of effectiveness: 'it's hearing about those successes which are really positive' (DT2). This included feedback from virtual schools: 'I recently had an email from the VSH congratulating me on one of the PEPs that she'd read, just to say that I obviously know the child very well and the things I've put in place are really good' (DT10); from teachers and parents/carers: 'it's the feedback I get from staff and from carers about the difference things are making' (DT4); and from children themselves: 'just getting nice feedback from students saying, thank you so much, we couldn't have gone through school without you' (DT12).

Despite challenges, DTs expressed that the role was very rewarding when they felt they were making a difference in children's lives: 'the payback is that you can see the effect you've had on that child and their life and their future' (DT10). However, participants expressed that it could be difficult to evaluate their sense of effectiveness or whether they were making a difference due to wider complexities in the lives of CLA: 'you can't always judge your impact in isolation because there's so many factors that lead into what happens for these young people' (DT7). Participants explained the role could feel particularly challenging when intervention/support was not having the desired impact: 'we do try - it doesn't always work out. But I think there are so many different complexities ... it's hard not knowing whether you've made a difference and perhaps feeling that you just haven't' (DT2); and DTs reflected that their sense of personal effectiveness could be very changeable: 'I have my moments where I feel like I'm amazing at what I do, and then I have my moments when I think to myself, what on earth possessed you to think you could do this?' (DT3). Because DTs were only one of many professionals involved in the lives of CLA, it was important to recognise the wider context when evaluating their sense of effectiveness: 'I'm only part of the picture and the teachers in school are only part of the picture ... the problem being I suppose, is the rest of the picture. ... you're working with lots of different people and you're not responsible for it all yourself' (DT4).

Theme 2: Building Relationships and Making Contacts

Working With and Through School Staff. Participants emphasised that working with and through school staff helped them enact their role effectively: 'if you really want to make a difference you've got to have the staff on board with you' (DT4). Because DTs were not always working directly with the children, they relied on staff to help champion the needs of care-experienced students: 'you can't do it all yourself.

You really need people to also be those advocates – you can't just be the only one who's the advocate for that child' (DT2). This involved increasing staff awareness about the needs and challenges faced by care-experienced children: 'you've got to understand where these kids came from ... you have to understand attachment, you have to understand trauma' (DT15). However, participants reported variation in how empathetic or supportive staff were about children's needs: 'the attitude of the teachers makes a massive difference ... teachers have a greater or lesser understanding of what effect being looked after can have (DT10). When school staff did not have the right level of understanding, they could risk having an inadvertent, negative impact on care-experienced children: 'they just don't deal with them in a particularly empathetic or appropriate way, which can escalate situations rather than making them better' (DT16). Yet, DTs often spoke positively about the responsiveness and engagement of school colleagues: 'I generally find the vast majority quite positive, and they want to make adaptations and get things right in the classroom and be as supportive as they can' (DT13). Participants also expressed that by working with and through staff, they could distribute some of their duties to make their role more manageable: 'we've got better here in the school [at] sharing out the responsibilities, so that's given me more capacity to look at other areas and all that I've got to do (DT5). Ultimately, DTs expressed that they needed the support of school colleagues to implement intervention and provision for the children: 'it's all well and good having all these good intentions and supporting these kids really well, but you need to make sure that your colleagues know who they are and are able to do it as well' (DT6).

Fostering A Reciprocal Relationship with Virtual Schools. Participants reported mixed experiences with their relationships with virtual schools. While some had developed strong and trusting relationships that helped both parties work more

effectively: 'we have respect for each other's way of working so it all just works a lot more smoothly – we have confidence in each other' (DT1); others reported less contact and support, making their role more challenging to navigate: 'in some authorities, they are very quiet, and you don't get much back – you have to pick your own way through' (DT4). Participants valued virtual schools who were responsive and actively involved in supporting DTs and children: 'they will drop everything, they will come and meet with me, they will meet with the child, they will suggest resources – they're very, very good' (DT14). However, not all participants experienced a mutually cooperative relationship with virtual schools, feeling instead a sense of culpability: 'it feels very much like virtual schools are there to hold us to account, rather than work collaboratively' (DT15). Participants expressed that fostering a reciprocal relationship meant recognising that virtual schools were not just there to oversee, but to provide backing and support to DTs: 'what I've learned now is that the virtual school are there to be our advocate, and our champion, and to support us ... actually, I can ask you to do stuff for me, I can ask for your help' (DT8); and a collaborative relationship was important as it enabled DTs to feel more comfortable approaching virtual schools for support: 'I'm happy to email about anything, even if I might look silly ... we have quite a good reciprocal relationship' (DT2). Ultimately, participants explained that developing strong links with virtual schools took time, commitment and often needed to be led by DTs themselves: 'because I've done it for quite a long time, I've got a link to various people ... just reaching out really, just keep asking questions – but it's very much driven by you' (DT12).

Developing Relationships with Parents, Carers and Children. Participants emphasised that developing relationships with parents/carers and children helped to gain a holistic understanding of CLA: '[it's] the relationships you build with people, the

relationships you build with the children, and a real, fresh understanding of children and why they are the way they are' (DT4). In their role, these relationships were often more important to participants than the bureaucratic tracking and monitoring of data: 'it's the relationships I've built with those children and the relationship I have with their parents that have actually made the difference as the DT, rather than the admin, paperwork, monitoring of pupil premium grants...' (DT3). This involved being emotionally responsive and identifying when parents/carers needed support: 'it really helps to have that good relationship with the carers – being able to empathise with them, because it's a really challenging role and job for them, but also recognising what support they might need' (DT2). Participants described how being in partnership with parents/carers and maintaining open dialogue helped promote positive outcomes for children at school and home: 'I speak to them almost daily, and it goes both ways – they get in touch with me if they've got a concern or a problem, and likewise, I can get in touch with them easily and they are happy to help and try and support at their end' (DT13). Participants recognised that it was not always easy to build strong and positive relationships with every parent/carer, but it was important to persevere: 'some carers are easier to develop that relationship with than others, but you still need to maintain a professional relationship with them' (DT16).

Similarly, DTs explained that building authentic connections with care-experienced children took time and commitment, but was essential for enacting meaningful change: 'forming a trusting relationship with the child as a DT can be very, very challenging, but without it, without the child believing you have their best interests at heart, there's very little you can do to support them ... in order to be truly effective, the kids have to trust you' (DT14). To develop trusting relationships with children, participants had to hold unconditional positive regard and communicate to the child

that they were accepted for who they are: 'wherever the child is – mentally, emotionally, socially – they know that you expect the best of them, you want the best for them, you'll provide the support they need to do the best they can. And just for them knowing that you've got their back' (DT10). While building positive relationships with children was a motivating factor for participants: 'I love the kids, they are brilliant. It's so rewarding' (DT6); the role came with an emotional toll: 'if you're doing the job right, and you've got the relationship, it's a two-way street so it does impact on you. You can't pretend it. You have to open yourself to the kids and the kids open themselves to you, and that's the hardest bit, but it's also the best bit' (DT3).

Establishing Links with Education, Health and Care Professionals.

Establishing links with professionals helped DTs understand what wider agencies could offer in support for CLA: 'It's that networking really. Being able to build up a network of agencies that are there in support' (DT13). Building relationships with mental health professionals helped participants develop a holistic understanding of their children: 'if they've got a CAMHS worker or therapist working alongside them, I always try and touch base with them and form a relationship with them, because then you get a full picture of the child' (DT12). However, it was not easy to develop working relationship with CAMHS due to wider pressures impacting workload and availability: 'you can't get through to talk to a person. I've never had a CAMHS representative turn up to an annual review or a PEP meeting' (DT14). Similarly, participants expressed that building strong links with social workers helped develop a sense of partnership and promoted collaborative, joined-up working: 'I desperately try to build up relationships with them, so that it's not a "them and us" – it's not a competition ... I try and make it so that we work harmoniously' (DT11).

Participants reported mixed experiences with EPs; while some had little direct involvement with them: 'I tend to have not dealt with the EPs, usually they go through our SENCO' (DT2); others reported stronger connections that helped improve their understanding of children's behaviour: 'there is a link EP in each virtual school, who I email quite frequently if there are behavioural issues ... that has really supported DTs, because there is somebody at the end of the email or at the end of the phone when a child starts showing quite unusual behaviours' (DT10).

Ultimately, participants expressed that relationships, and the ability to build links and connections, were at the centre of their role: 'in the same way that teaching is about relationships with the students, being a DT is about relationship with the LA ... we develop these relationships which do change the way that you work' (DT14). Building effective relationship and making contacts in the system had an impact on how DTs experienced their role: 'it's about working with the people, it's the working relationships – that makes a difference, and it makes the job much easier' (DT2).

Theme 3: Negotiating Challenges in the Wider System

A Lack of Standardisation Between Counties. Participants explained that they often worked with multiple LAs as CLA could come from counties across the country: 'the children that you have in your schools that are looked after are not necessarily from the same authority that you work in' (DT16). For participants with high numbers of CLA, this meant working with numerous counties: 'we have 11 looked after children from seven different LAs' (DT1). This was challenging because every county had their own processes and procedures for managing CLA: 'they all do everything differently so it's really complicated, from how they do funding, how you apply for stuff, how they run the PEPs...' (DT8).

A key difference between counties related to PEP process and procedure: 'the forms are significantly different that we have to fill in as part of the PEP' (DT12). A lack of standardisation between PEPs was challenging because participants had to adapt to multiple systems depending on which county they were working with: 'each one wants a slightly different set of information or they want it presented slightly differently ... some of my LAs are still paper-based, so I'm completing a paper-based PEP three times a year' (DT14). Participations expressed that even counties using online PEP platforms were not standardised: 'different counties have different e-PEP systems, which is very confusing' (DT8). As well as keeping track of different sets of paperwork, key deadlines also varied: 'they might have slightly different timescales and key dates to keep to' (DT1). Participants explained that an additional procedural complication were PEP funding arrangements, which differed between counties: 'we draw down the money slightly differently for every virtual school ... they all get the same amount of money, but they all choose to spend it and give it out in different ways' (DT8).

A lack of standardisation in process and procedure meant there was also a lack of standardisation in expectations on DTs' roles: 'each borough has a different expectation on how much detail and how much ownership of the PEP process the DTs have to take' (DT3). Participants explained that their role during PEP meetings varied depending on LA, and expectations were not clear: 'some expect you to chair the meeting, to write up notes, to take all the minutes. Others, that's done for you ... when a child comes in from another county, you're never quite sure what they expect of you' (DT9). These variations in expectations were also experienced when working with different social workers: 'sometimes they expect me to know everything and that's one challenge, but sometimes they treat me as if I've never done the role before and don't even know what a looked after child is, and that's another challenge' (DT7). Ultimately,

DTs expressed a desire for greater consistency in process, procedure, and expectations between counties: 'just give me a standardised process, just one singular procedure that allows me to meet the expectations – the evidencing and bureaucratic expectations of the LA – in a really nice, simplified manner' (DT14).

Difficulties with Joined-Up Working. Ineffective communication and difficulties with joined-up working between services made it harder for DTs to make holistically-informed decisions about support for CLA: 'I feel like we're not always working in tandem, and we don't always have all of the information. It's hard to make choices and to move things forward if you don't understand the full picture' (DT2). Participants explained that effective working between education, health and care professionals could be challenging because it did not feel like the separate systems were coordinated: 'the way that the three services operate and the timescales, the speeds at which we work, are not synchronised at all ... it's silly things like social care will call strategy meetings for a Saturday or in the middle of the holidays and then we struggle to have people who can attend them' (DT1). Participants often spoke about the benefits of joined-up working but expressed frustration that there seemed to be difficulties achieving a coordinated approach across the country: 'multi-agency work is great, when it works ... it's not organised and it's not good enough and again, I think that's a national issue' (DT14).

Joined-up working with social care could be particularly challenging because of high turnover and a lack of consistency with staff: 'some children that we've had in the past have had a different social worker each time you've had a meeting, and you're re-explaining the same thing to them each time that they're there' (DT16). Participants explained that high turnover of social workers interrupted joined-up working because key information was not always passed on: 'you get changed social workers and they

don't tell you, and then there's no consistency because the person's left and it doesn't get handed over' (DT12). Frequent changes made it challenging for DTs and children to build consistent relationships with social workers: 'the student doesn't have the relationship with them, we don't have the relationship with them, therefore we don't understand all of the pressures and the factors that they're dealing with' (DT1). Participants expressed that consistent contact with social workers was particularly important when working with CLA, to ensure that pertinent details were shared timely and appropriately: 'you have to be able to communicate, not daily, but certainly communicate every little thing because sometimes small things with the kids is what makes a big difference' (DT13). Despite frustrations, many DTs reflected that difficulties with joined-up working were impacted by wider systemic factors affecting social services, rather than an individual lack of care or commitment from social workers: 'I really do feel for them, because there's some really good practice, for both the LAs I work with, but they just don't have the time to carry it out properly' (DT10).

Joined-up working with other agencies was also challenging; participants expressed it was difficult to collaborate with mental health services as the system was overloaded with referrals and wait-times for CAMHS were high: 'CAMHS you've got a year and a half to wait – if you can get on the waiting list' (DT11). Moreover, DTs explained that budget constraints within schools and LAs made it difficult to maintain consistency with EPs: 'unfortunately, with a funding crisis going on in the LA, I'm now on my fourth EP in five years, and I don't actually have one at the moment' (DT3). Some participants expressed concern about the equitability of commissioning EP services as it reduced access to, and involvement from, these professionals: 'we are now a traded service and therefore you have to buy into it ... it's a bit of a sore point with me – I think it should be every child's right to access an EP whether the school

can afford it or not' (DT11). Ultimately, DTs expressed a desire for greater collaboration with professionals from education, health and care, and emphasised that ineffective joined-up working could have a detrimental impact on CLA's outcomes: 'the friction between those three services does lessen somewhat, the impact that we have on these students' (DT1).

Finally, participants explained that reduced input and involvement from health and care meant that greater pressure was being placed on schools to provide more than education support: 'I'm not only a headteacher but I am a social worker, I am health – we're everything at the moment because there's a lack of support out there, so we do it all' (DT5). Participants particularly felt an increasing expectation on schools to provide higher and higher levels of pastoral support: 'I feel we get put on quite a lot – we become social workers, we become counsellors, we become parent supporters, we become so many different things that schools never used to be' (DT9). Participants explained that, in order for schools to effectively identify and meet students' wellbeing needs, there needed to be greater acknowledgment, support and resources for schools to develop and expand their pastoral support systems: 'schools are the frontline of pastoral support ... we need to buy into that idea and support teachers and support pastoral people within schools' (DT6). However, concerns were raised that schools were being expected to meet children's complex needs without the appropriate frameworks, systems, or expertise: 'we're no longer just education people, we are parenting people, we are psychologists, we are sometimes doctors, nurses, trauma specialists – we have to be a jack of all trades. It just concerns me that in these specialist areas, we are master of none' (DT11).

Overly Bureaucratic Process and Procedure. Another challenge for DTs involved navigating complex and convoluted process and procedure that impacted

their ability to make meaningful change: 'there are ways to do things quicker – not everything needs to be this bureaucratic nightmare ... there seems to be lots and lots of bureaucracy, very little actual punch, very little actual action' (DT6). One common frustration was around lengthy PEP paperwork: 'the PEP form isn't intuitive and therefore you have to think really carefully about what you're filling in where, which takes up a lot of the time' (DT7). These experiences were amplified in specialist settings with high numbers of CLA: 'with 30 students, that's 90 PEPs. They also have their LAC reviews, so there are two of those a year so that's 150 meetings a year – and that's without my annual reviews' (DT14). Some participants expressed that the extensive details gathered for PEPs did not always feel relevant, purposeful or meaningful: 'it's not for the children, that frustrates me – it's to tick a box ... I think they need to review what is the information that they need' (DT5). As well as being a timely process, participants expressed exasperation that the detailed information collected did not seem to be read by others or serve any purpose: 'it is insane the amount of time that I spend completing paperwork. What really gets my goat though, apart from the fact that it's not standardised, is that no one ever looks at it ... nobody looks at the PEP document until the next PEP meeting' (DT14). While participants recognised the importance of keeping records and monitoring outcomes, DTs expressed that the current system for doing so did not feel fit for purpose: 'I get that we all have to – every child in the country who is a looked after child should have the same opportunities. But a rigid computer system does not make that reality' (DT15).

Additionally, DTs explained that funding processes could be challenging to negotiate, which made it difficult to provide consistent support for CLA: 'I do an awful lot of tap-dancing for money and I beg, and I apply for grants, but it doesn't give me any security and consistency in what I can offer' (DT3). Participants reported variation

between counties around funding procedures: 'the government delegates £2300 for our looked after children, but in our area, we only received £1500 of that' (DT5). While some DTs experienced greater freedom and easier access to funding in their LAs: 'maybe this is because I'm in a slightly more affluent area around here, but both [LAs] are really liberal with their purse strings. They're more than happy to give funding for things' (DT6); others expressed frustration at the level of scrutiny and justification required: 'we've got to justify, to the penny, what we've spent ... of course we're going to spend the money on the children, and then you've got to go and justify it by saying that I've put a Learning Support Assistant in there for 20 minutes at £3.25 – it's just a waste of time' (DT5). Participants emphasised that provision for CLA should be needed, rather than constrained by funding caps, as each student will need different levels of support: 'it's what that child needs at that point in time ... some children need additional therapies and things like that, but then other children have already had that in their past and they've worked through things, so they don't need that extra funding' (DT16). Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring funding was used meaningfully: 'often the interventions that I'm asked to put in place, or the interventions that are suggested for the students using their funding, they tend to be one-size-fits-all. I have to sometimes go back and say, actually that's not going to make any difference to the student' (DT13). Many participants felt there was inadequate funding for CLA, despite ongoing revisions nationally: 'the government have changed the national funding formulas for schools – I've lost count of how many times. Every year it's something different. And every year, no matter what they say about how we're more funded than ever, it seems to be getting less and less' (DT3).

Overall, DTs expressed frustration when negotiating challenges in the wider system: 'if I could speak to somebody in the government position, it would be to tell

them that the system is broken, the system doesn't work' (DT14). Participants explained that their role was made more difficult by ineffective systems and processes, and perceived that similar challenges were being felt by DTs nationwide: 'you just hope that you can get it through and get it done, and I guess that's just how it is and that's the same cross the country and it's only going to get worse' (DT15). Some expressed a desire for change in how the care system operated, and for DTs to be held at the centre of these discussions: 'enter a consultation period, go and talk to your DTs, find out what's wrong with the system, find out what's wrong with the process and then redesign it' (DT14). Instead of facilitating the work of DTs, participants expressed that the current systemic issues were hindering the impact of their role in supporting outcomes for care-experienced children: 'I think the biggest challenge is sometimes you have to work hard despite the system, rather than with or because of the system' (DT1).

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Overview

This chapter revisits the study's aims and research questions, then discusses key findings from Chapter 4 alongside relevant literature, research, and psychological theory. This research aimed to explore how DTs experience and enact their roles, including key responsibilities, barriers and facilitating factors impacting their role, and perceptions around their effectiveness. This included understanding how DTs worked with other professionals to support outcomes for care-experienced children. To address these aims, three research questions were developed and will be discussed in turn.

5.2. Research Question One

How do statutory regulations or recommendations about the DT role relate to DT practice?

This question explored the relationship between national policy and statutory guidelines about the DT role, and the lived experiences of DTs. Discussion draws on statutory regulations and recommendations, findings from the current study, and previous research on DT experiences.

Assigning the Role

Statutory guidance outlines that governing bodies of schools must ensure that an appropriately qualified member of staff is assigned to the DT role (DfE, 2018b). While not explicitly stated, there is an assumption that this person would be involved in the process and have made an informed decision to undertake the duty. However, within the subtheme *Role Development and 'Learning on the Job'*, interview

participants described unexpectedly inheriting or acquiring the role as part of an additional title or internal promotion, rather than actively applying to become the DT. These experiences mirror findings from Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003) who reported that formal applications and careful discussions about assigning DT roles were uncommon; rather, the role was generally attached to another position, such as safeguarding lead. Similarly, DTs in Hayden's (2005) study reported being given the role without being consulted, and found the title simply added to their job description. Unexpectedly acquiring the role meant that DTs could risk undertaking the duty without knowing what was expected of them. The DT role was established to support some of the most vulnerable children in society (DfE, 2018b), and participants in this study emphasised that the role should not be taken on lightly. Moreover, involving teachers in decision-making has been associated with increased levels of self-efficacy – the belief that one can meet the demands and challenges of the job (Sarafidou & Chatziioannidis, 2013) – as well as increased dedication, job satisfaction, motivation and responsibility (Cheng, 2008). Therefore, decisions around assigning the role should be considered carefully by governing bodies and in consultation with prospective DTs; however, findings from the current study suggest that this is not happening as often as it should.

Positions of Seniority

Since the DT role was introduced, regulations have suggested that DTs should hold a senior position in schools to effectively enact change and champion the needs of care-experienced children (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2018b; DfEE & DoH, 2000). The DT role itself is not ordinarily a standalone position, nor a senior title, but rather an additional duty attached to other roles. Therefore, the level of seniority a DT holds largely depends on their existing roles. Encouragingly, survey findings indicated that

most DTs held a leadership position, and additional roles commonly held were headteacher, deputy or assistant head. In Simpson's (2012) study, virtual schools agreed that DTs should hold a senior position in schools to help raise the profile of CLA. Similarly, Higgs (2006) found that having a substantive position in school helped DTs be more effective as they had the authority to enact change, both within school and with wider agencies. However, seniority alone was not always the driving factor for change, and Higgs' (2006) participants suggested that the personality or personal qualities of DTs were also important for enacting change. This was echoed by interview participants in the current study, within the subtheme *Measuring Impact and Making a Difference*, many of whom were driven by a personal desire to make a difference regardless of their position or seniority. However, despite 82% of DTs in the survey holding leadership roles, concerns about a lack of status, recognition and influence within the DT role were raised, which will be explored further in research question two.

Training Opportunities

When the DT role was introduced, LAs were tasked with providing appropriate training to ensure DTs had the knowledge and experience to carry out duties effectively (DfEE & DoH, 2000). In the current study, virtual schools cited training as a fundamental area of support provided, which included training on the roles and responsibilities of DTs. However, only half of DTs in the survey reported receiving initial training, and two-fifths reported that they did not feel confident and prepared when they first took up the role. Similar findings were reported by Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003), whereby half of DTs interviewed had not received specific training for the role. Although their research was undertaken before training became mandatory (Children and Young Persons Act, 2008), it was concerning that one-third of DTs in

the current study had not received initial training despite it being a statutory requirement. Furthermore, within the subtheme *Role Development and 'Learning on the Job'*, interview participants explained that in lieu of formal training, they often learned experientially through trial and error, highlighting a need for greater access to training during both initial stages of the role as well as ongoing opportunities. Simpson (2012) reported that DTs were eager to access more training, however the study did not report on the proportion that had received initial training. Goodall (2014) reported that all DTs in their study had received initial training, however the sample was small and all participants were from the same LA. Participants from Goodall's (2014) study also expressed a desire for more training, yet emphasised that training needed to meet the needs of DTs. Similar requests were made by interview participants in the current study, who explained that training experiences were mixed, and training could be generic. Instead, DTs wanted more training about their role/responsibilities, which included functional aspects of the job such as developing PEPs and using different systems, and training on effective support or provision for care-experienced children.

Time Spent Enacting Key Duties

Around two-thirds of DTs surveyed in this study indicated that they were able to dedicate less than one day per week to their DT role. Participants explained that this was often the amount of time they could physically devote to the role, rather than the amount of time needed to effectively complete duties. Statutory regulations do not stipulate how much time is needed for the DT role. Instead, current guidance acknowledges that the way the role is carried out will vary between schools and will depend on the number of care-experienced children on roll and their individual needs (DfE, 2018c). Although this wording offers flexibility around the amount of time needed to undertake DT duties, within the subtheme *Managing Workloads and 'Wearing Lots*

of Hats', interview participants emphasised that the role often required more time of them than expected, and sometimes more time than they could offer among additional roles and responsibilities. Similar experiences were reported in previous research; time to fulfil the role often varied between schools (Higgs, 2006) and the role generally did not have specific time allocated, although some were given non-contact time during the week to complete duties (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Hayden, 2005).

Survey findings from the current study also explored time spent by DTs enacting key statutory duties over the course of a term. There were a range of responses, highlighting the variation in how the role is enacted within individual school settings. Only broad generalisations can be made about how often DTs undertook key duties; nevertheless, findings aim to provide further insight into DT practice.

Safeguarding and Direct Work with Children. Safeguarding and direct work with care-experienced children were often undertaken daily. It is understandable that monitoring safeguarding concerns was identified as a key priority for DTs, as care-experienced children have either suffered significant harm, or have been at risk of suffering significant harm (Children Act, 1989). Abuse or neglect represent the most common reason that children are placed into care (DfE, 2020b), and these pre-care experiences can put care-experienced children at greater risk to further vulnerabilities – physically, emotionally and psychologically (Cameron & Maginn, 2009; Jackson, 2013). Statutory guidance on *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (DfE, 2021) explicitly states that schools must ensure that staff have the skills, knowledge and understanding to keep care-experienced children safe, as they have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group. Because safeguarding concerns must be acted on immediately, daily monitoring and joined-up working with safeguarding leads is promoted to ensure that prompt action is taken when required.

Additionally, statutory guidance outlines that ‘designated teachers are likely to have a more direct and day-to-day role in promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children, either directly or through appropriate delegation’ (DfE, 2018; p.12). Survey findings mirror these guidelines, as direct work with care-experienced children was identified as a daily task by many DTs. Direct work could take different forms, from mentoring, delivering interventions and teaching, to more informal check-ins or time spent building relationships. Yet, within the theme *Building Relationships and Making Contacts*, several interview participants expressed that they spent less time with the children than expected, and their role involved facilitating support *around* children and working with and through school staff, rather than always being the person that delivered the support. Similarly, Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003) reported that DTs saw themselves as the key contact and representative for care-experienced children, yet the amount of direct time spent with CLA often depended on the size of the school and the individual needs of each child. Again, this highlights the variation in how the DT role is enacted based on school setting and children’s needs, and the flexibility needed to enact duties effectively.

Liaising with Parents, Carers and Teachers. Duties commonly enacted on a weekly or monthly basis included liaising with parents/carers and guardians to promote good home-school links, and advising teachers about how to support care-experienced children. Guidance from the *Virtual School Handbook* (NAVSH, 2018) outlined that parents/carers should always be involved in education planning, and schools should encourage and support parents/carers to promote their child’s education at home. Within the subtheme *Developing Relationships with Parents, Carers and Children*, interview participants emphasised that building relationships with parents/carers was central to their role as it helped create a holistic understanding of

children; regular contact was important for building these connections. Participants recognised that it was not always easy to build strong and positive relationships with every parent/carer, but that it was important to persevere as being in partnership and maintaining open dialogue helped promote positive outcomes for children at home and school. Designated teachers from previous research have described similar experiences, placing emphasis on time spent forming relationships with parents/carers to promote effective communication and information sharing (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003). Like DTs in the current study, Goodall's (2014) research described relationship building with parents/carers as being mutually beneficial, where parents/carers helped to support children's education, while DTs helped to support home-life. By working closely with parents/carers, DTs were better placed to identify early concerns and provide or signpost to additional support.

Liaising with and advising teachers about how to support the learning and social-emotional needs of care-experienced children was recognised by survey participants as an ongoing duty, and reinforced by the subtheme *Working With and Through School Staff*. This was echoed by DTs in previous literature, who expressed that they were responsible for cascading information and training staff about how to support CLA (Goodall, 2014; Waterman, 2020). Working with colleagues has been identified as an important part of the DT role; Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003) described DTs as being 'dependent on the cooperation of colleagues' to meet their duties effectively, therefore fostering good relationships and maintaining regular contact was essential (p.131). Recommendations from Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003) included greater training for school staff about the DT role and the needs of CLA; participants in the current study made similar requests, suggesting that more training and a greater understanding in schools about the needs of care-experienced children would be

useful. This included training for staff on attachment, trauma, ACEs, and support strategies. More on DTs' experiences of working with school staff to support the needs of care-experienced children will be discussed in research question two.

Implementing PEPs, Working with Virtual Schools and Developing School Policy. Finally, duties commonly enacted termly included developing/implementing PEPs, working with virtual schools to promote children's education, and developing or reviewing whole-school policy. Statutory guidance stipulates that PEPs must be reviewed regularly (i.e. at three and six-month intervals) (DfE, 2018c). Therefore, it is understandable that this duty was broadly recognised as a termly responsibility. However, around half of DTs surveyed reported that they spent time between PEPs preparing paperwork or following up on actions. All DTs in the current study recognised their statutory role in developing and implementing PEPs; however, the more CLA they had, the more PEPs, which meant that DTs with high proportions of CLA were spending significant amounts of time preparing and implementing PEPs. Moreover, PEP meetings could be time-intensive and Hayden (2005) reported that schools did not always have the capacity to release teachers to attend, despite the process supporting information sharing between schools and social workers. Previous research has highlighted that DTs held mixed views about the functionality of PEPs (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Hayden, 2005; Higgs, 2006; Parker, 2017), which were echoed by participants in the current study and will be discussed further in research question two.

Most survey participants reported termly contact with virtual schools. Virtual schools have a statutory responsibility to ensure that arrangements are in place to improve educational outcomes for CLA (Children and Families Act, 2014) and establish effective working relationships with DTs (DfE, 2018b; NAVSH, 2018).

Additionally, guidance encourages virtual schools to attend all PEP meetings (NAVSH, 2018). As such, virtual schools can be seen as having both a strategic and direct role; supporting schools and multiagency partners to raise the profile and education of CLA, while also working directly with schools, parents/carers and children (Drew & Banerjee, 2019). In the current study, virtual schools recognised the importance of maintaining contact and building relationships with DTs, which included being present and available to offer guidance, advice and attend PEPs. Designated teachers valued regular contact with virtual schools, and their working relationships with virtual schools will be discussed further in research question three.

Developing or reviewing whole-school policy can be considered a systemic duty, therefore it was understandable that DTs devoted less time to these responsibilities each term. Government guidelines recommend that school policies should be reviewed at least annually, to ensure that they are up-to-date (DfE, 2020d) which broadly correlate with participants responses. Designated teachers' experiences implementing attachment-aware and trauma-informed approaches at a whole-school level will be discussed in research questions two.

Previously Looked After Children

Following the introduction of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, new duties were placed on LAs, virtual schools and DTs to promote the educational achievement of *all* care-experienced children. In the current study, previously looked after children were not mentioned as frequently during surveys or interviews. While DTs recognised their statutory duties extended to all care-experienced children, the subtheme *Role Clarity and Expectations in an 'All-Encompassing Role'* highlighted that it could be challenging for DTs to identify who previously looked after children were as there was

no centralised system for tracking and monitoring this data. Participants explained that if a child was new to the school (from another area or borough) there was no way of knowing if they were previously looked after unless it was specifically mentioned on their admission form, referral form or school database, which was rare. As a result, previously looked after children could risk falling under the radar. This sense of uncertainty about these new expectations have been echoed by others. Martindale (2019) argued that many schools and LAs were still unclear about what this extended role meant, which children were included, and how best to support previously looked after children. While statutory guidance outlines that DTs must ask parents for evidence of their previously looked after status to determine eligibility for PP+ funding, this may be a sensitive topic for families, and not all parents will want to disclose this information. Several participants in the current study felt that virtual schools should provide more support around identifying previously looked after children, however the virtual school handbook (NAVSH, 2018) states that virtual schools do not always have access to this information, and place the responsibility on schools to develop their own systems for monitoring care-experienced children.

Although DTs expressed concerns that these additional duties were placed on them without enough clarity and with little acknowledgement about the time implications it would come with, there was general recognition that previously looked after children were a vulnerable group that would benefit from additional support/provision. The needs of children do not disappear once they leave care, and many will have suffered abuse, neglect and trauma alongside periods of disrupted learning and missed schooling that can affect engagement at school and act as a barrier to academic progress, mental health and wellbeing, and future outcomes (Adoption UK & DfE, 2018; Cameron & Maginn, 2009; Jackson, 2013; PAC-UK & DfE,

2014). However, findings from the current study suggest that there was still uncertainty about how schools can best support all care-experienced children, particularly regarding accurate and sensitive identification.

5.3. Research Question Two

What barriers and facilitating factors impact how DTs experience and enact their role?

a) What are some of the key challenges faced by DTs and what factors help mitigate against these challenges?

b) What factors impact DTs' sense of personal effectiveness?

This question explored factors impacting DTs' role and experiences. This included key challenges faced by DTs and facilitating factors that could mitigate against challenges. This question also explored factors impacting DTs' sense of effectiveness: what helped them feel like they were making a difference or having an impact on the lives of care-experienced children.

Time and Workload

A key challenge identified by survey and interview participants related to time and workload pressures. Virtual schools were concerned that DTs did not always have enough time to devote to their role, as high workload could result in a reduced capacity to meet children's needs. In line with previous research, DTs in the current study emphasised that the role could be time-intensive, particularly when there were higher numbers of care-experienced children in schools, and it could be challenging to manage their duties effectively amid multiple responsibilities (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Simpson, 2012; Waterman, 2020). As with prior studies, all participants in the current research held at least one additional role, with many holding

several titles, including headteacher, SENCO and DSL. Workload pressures in schools are well documented; in a survey by Walker et al. (2019), senior leaders reported working an average of 55.1 hours in a given week, compared to 49.5 hours for teachers and middle leaders, and a national average of 37.2 hours per week for full-time workers (Office for National Statistics, 2019). This suggests that, while DTs with senior roles might have greater authority and status to enact change, they may have even less time in school to devote to DT duties. However, the workload survey also highlighted that over three-quarters of *all* teachers felt that workload was a 'fairly serious' or 'very serious' problem (Walker et al., 2019), indicating that DTs without leadership roles could risk having both diminished authority *and* time to enact their duties.

Within the subtheme *Role Awareness and 'Raising the Profile'*, DT interview participants expressed a desire for greater recognition about the amount of time the role needed, and a need for protected time to complete their duties effectively; those that had allocated time expressed that this could mitigate against these challenges. Goodall (2014) concluded that DTs needed to be given enough time to fulfil their responsibilities but emphasised that a blanket amount of time may not be appropriate. Instead, time allocation needed to be considered individually within each school context, depending on the needs of care-experienced children and DTs themselves. Within the interview subtheme *Managing Workloads and Wearing 'Lots of Hats'*, several DTs in the current study suggested sharing or delegating the role between multiple members of staff to help reduce workload pressures. This practice has been supported by statutory guidance, which outlines that not all aspects of the DT role need to be undertaken by a single individual (DfE, 2018c). This practice was also reported by other researchers, where DTs delegated specific tasks to others to help

manage workload and fulfil duties more effectively (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Higgs, 2006).

Role Awareness, Status and Recognition

Another challenge related to awareness, status, and recognition of the DT role. Survey and interview findings highlighted a general lack of awareness about the DT role in schools; DTs reported that staff and senior leaders did not always recognise the role's function or importance, and many felt the role lacked influence and status. Moreover, within the subtheme *Role Awareness and 'Raising the Profile'* several interview participants reflected that they too were unaware of the role until they undertook the duty. Similar experiences have been reported in previous literature; while Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003) found that headteachers were often very aware of DT's roles and responsibilities, other staff were less clear about what the role involved. Waterman (2020) concluded that DTs' experiences were based on their seniority or standing within school and their level of power or influence. Similarly, DTs in Goodall's (2014) study reported that other staff did not seem to acknowledge, recognise or understand the DT role, which could result in DTs feeling a sense of isolation; moreover, DTs did not tend to actively make their role known to others and Goodall (2014) reported that the role could sometimes fall to the side-line in schools.

In the current study, several virtual schools expressed that awareness about the DT role and the ability to enact change was influenced by DTs' level of seniority. However, even DTs with leadership roles held concerns about the level of recognition and influence the role had. Interview and survey participants explained that the DT role itself does not come with the level of authority and influence it needs to be effective, and DTs often had to use their other titles and positions of seniority to enact

change. This suggests that having DTs in leadership positions is not enough to raise the profile of care-experienced children in schools; the role itself needs greater status and recognition, as well as increased awareness about the role's significance. Goodall (2014) drew parallels between the lack of voice, power, and status that CLA faced within society, and DTs' own lack of recognition in the system, concluding that external support from wider professionals and ongoing research was needed to raise awareness about the role and voice of DTs; findings from the current research correspond with these conclusions.

Role Identity. Designated teachers' perceptions about their role, including their perceived level of recognition, status, influence and standing within school, provide insight into their sense of professional identity. Identity plays an important role in teacher development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) and Day et al. (2006) argued that identity can influence teachers' sense of purpose, motivation, satisfaction and effectiveness in their role. Therefore, understanding professional identity is essential for supporting teachers' effectiveness and resiliency (Day & Kington, 2008). Ultimately, teachers' identities can be more or less stable at different periods of time, depending on a range of personal, interpersonal and institutional factors (Day et al., 2006). These include teachers' unique experiences that shape their personal beliefs about identity; interpersonal relationships with colleagues and students that shape how their identity is perceived by others; and social, cultural and political influences at an institutional or systemic level that determine how teachers enact their roles (Ye & Zhao, 2019).

In the current study, DTs often inherited the role as part of an additional responsibility, and many reported that their understanding of the role – what it meant and how to do it – continued to develop experientially. This suggests that participants' identities as DTs were still being shaped, and perhaps, were less well developed than

identities held about their other teaching roles. Additionally, negative perceptions held about how the DT role was recognised and understood by others could detrimentally impact on DTs' identity development, as well as their sense of motivation, resiliency and effectiveness. Day et al. (2006) argued that agency – the ability to move ideas forward and reach goals – had strong associations with identity. Designated teachers' ability (or inability) to effectively enact positive change could also impact on their sense of identity and role satisfaction. Indeed, participants in the current study often described frustration at the lack of influence they had in school, and the deep emotional impact when their work did not seem to be making a difference in children's lives.

Networking Opportunities. Interacting with others in similar roles is considered a key factor in developing professional role identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009); however, because there is typically only one DT per school, opportunities to interact with one another was limited. Designated teachers in this and previous research have reported that networking opportunities were not available in every authority (see interview subtheme *Role Development and 'Learning on the Job'* and Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014). For those who were able to attend, networking was generally received positively, and seen as an opportunity to connect with other DTs, share experiences, reflect on practice, and deepen their understanding about the role (Ofsted, 2012). Networking is a social process, where specialised knowledge can be created and transferred through collaboration (Muijs et al., 2010, 2014). This process aligns itself with a social constructivist perspective, in which learning and knowledge construction is viewed as a social act, mediated through interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). As such, networking opportunities can create communities of practice, where DTs are able to develop their professional identity and

understanding about the role by interacting with others who have shared experiences (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). As well as supporting the development of professional identity, social support can alleviate the negative impact of emotional exhaustion and promote greater job satisfaction and feelings of personal accomplishment (Kinman et al., 2011). Ultimately, collaboration between DTs can assist in clarifying roles and responsibilities, building confidence and promoting positive self-concepts (Moon et al., 2000).

Physical attendance at networking could be challenging due to time constraints; however, access to online communities and virtual networks may enable more DTs to connect and share knowledge. The perceived impact of online forums was explored by Wedell (2012) who developed an online forum for SENCOs to network and support one another. Like DTs, SENCOs can experience a sense of isolation in their schools as they too hold a unique role. Encouragingly, SENCOs in Wedell's (2012) study expressed that the online tool acted as an immediate point of contact for time critical queries and enabled SENCOs to connect quickly, share challenges and identify solutions, which ultimately supported their practice. An online community or network may therefore be beneficial for DTs who may ordinarily miss out on opportunities to connect.

Staff Engagement and Understanding about Care-Experienced Children

Within the theme *Building Relationships and Making Links*, interview participants emphasised that working with and through school staff helped them enact their role more effectively. However, DTs reported variation in how empathetic or understanding staff were about the needs of care-experienced children, which posed a challenge. Unfortunately, negative perceptions about care-experienced children

have persisted over time; historically, the education of CLA have not been prioritised, and negative assumptions and low expectations about their ability to succeed have contributed to widening attainment gaps in an already vulnerable population (Berridge, 2012; Jackson & Sachdev, 2001). Harker et al. (2003) reported that many CLA perceived negative labelling and stereotyping from teachers who did not always understand the complexity of what it meant to be in care, including the emotional impact of their experiences. However, children in Harker's et al. (2003) study also described the positive impact teachers could have by providing emotional support, stability and a source of comfort. Drawing on self-efficacy theory, Brooks and Goldstein (2008) argued that teachers' expectations can impact how they interact with their students; low expectations about CLA may result in reduced levels of support, yet high expectations and recognition of children's needs could promote outcomes. Similar to DT experiences in the current study, Fletcher-Campbell et al. (2003) reported that school staff were generally aware that developmental trauma had an impact on children's behaviour, but could find it difficult to make reasonable adjustments for behaviour. However, outcomes improved when teachers developed strong and trusting relationships with pupils. Trauma-informed schools training were cited by Waterman (2020) as having a positive impact on schools; however, training alone was not enough to deepen staff understanding about how to support CLA; effective implementation was essential.

Implementing Attachment-aware and Trauma-Informed Approaches.

Numerous participants in the current study hoped to introduce attachment-aware and trauma-informed approaches more widely in schools, approaches that are gaining momentum in UK schools and internationally (Kelly et al., 2020). The approaches are underpinned by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) and aim to provide staff with the

knowledge, understanding and practice to promote nurturing relationships that support healthy social-emotional development and pupil engagement (Colley & Cooper, 2017). Research indicates that around one-in-four children experience insecure attachment, with even higher rates among CLA populations (Cyr et al., 2010); promisingly, secondary attachment figures, such as teachers, can mitigate against the negative impact of insecure attachment and promote positive academic and social outcomes (Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2018; Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Geddes, 2006; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Pianta, 1992). Evaluations on the impact of attachment-aware schools have demonstrated positive outcomes. These include improvements in academic achievement and decreased sanctions/exclusions (Rose et al., 2019), as well as deepening staff understanding about the impact of trauma and attachment needs on learning and behaviour, creating a more nurturing school environment (Dingwall & Sebba, 2018b, 2018a; Fancourt & Sebba, 2018).

However, implementing new initiatives in school can be challenging, particularly those that go against traditional views about managing and understanding behaviour (Parker & Levinson, 2018). Within the subtheme *Working With and Through School Staff*, interview participants reported varying degrees of success when implementing and maintaining attachment-aware or trauma-informed approaches, expressing a desire for increased staff awareness and understanding about the needs of care-experienced children. Research indicates that successful implementation is a staged process that develops over a period of time (Aarons et al., 2011; Sharples et al., 2018). While initial training is important for developing staff understanding about initiatives, effective implementation involves ongoing follow-up and supporting activities to embed knowledge and practice (Cordingley et al., 2015). Senior leaders play an important role in implementing new initiatives through planning, resourcing, delivering

and monitoring the process in schools, and by creating an environment where change is possible and staff feel safe to try new ideas (Aarons, 2006; Dyssegaard et al., 2017; Moullin et al., 2018). Again, this emphasises the importance of raising the status of DTs to help enact meaningful change at a whole-school level.

Although school staff did not always have a good understanding or awareness about the needs of care-experienced children, DTs themselves held good insight into the complex challenges faced by these students. Designated teachers felt passionately about their role as champion for care-experienced children, and recognised the significance of their role in promoting positive outcomes, both now and into the future. This suggests that the statutory reforms introduced to raise the profile of care-experienced children are having an impact, although there is more to be done to increase awareness and understanding in schools more widely.

Managing Bureaucracy and Administration

Bureaucratic and administrative challenges were identified as a significant challenge in the current study within surveys (see *Key Challenges Faced by DTs*) and interviews (see the subtheme *A Lack of Standardisation Between Counties*). This primarily related to difficulties working with multiple LAs, as each had their own processes, procedures, and systems for managing CLA. This resulted in a lack of consistency in how DTs enacted their duties, and on the expectations placed on them from different boroughs. Frustration about a lack of standardisation between authorities was not a new challenge for DTs; Higgs (2006) highlighted that a lack of uniformity between counties made it challenging for DTs to complete PEPs and connect with social workers from distant authorities. For DTs with high numbers of CLA across England, this meant working with numerous LAs and virtual schools, as

well as having to negotiate multiple systems. Notably, only two virtual school staff in the survey identified that a lack of standardisation between counties was a key challenge for DTs, suggesting that virtual schools are perhaps less aware that this poses significant issues for DTs.

PEP Process and Procedure. For DTs in the current study, a notable difference between counties related to PEP process and procedure. Many participants felt that PEPs were a laborious process and the extensive details gathered did not always feel relevant, purposeful, or meaningful. Frustration about PEPs have been expressed by DTs in previous research, where the process has been described as a repetitive, time-consuming and unwieldy paper-filling exercise (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Hayden, 2005; Higgs, 2006; Waterman, 2020). Despite frustrations with PEPs, DTs recognised the importance of the process in supporting information sharing between education and care, yet contended that more needed to be done to make the process more meaningful (Goodall, 2014; Hayden, 2005; Waterman, 2020). In the interview subtheme *Overly Bureaucratic Process and Procedure*, numerous DTs called for a review of PEP paperwork nationwide to develop a more standardised and simplified process for tracking and monitoring children's outcomes.

Concerns about overly bureaucratic and unstandardised processes are not unique to the area of care, but a persistent issue for SEN systems where several comparisons can be made. A formal inquiry by the House of Commons Education Committee (2019) reported that a lack of standardisation between counties relating to process, procedure and paperwork created confusion, pressure and additional burdens on schools and professionals. In the review, schools expressed frustration at inconsistencies between LAs around thresholds, paperwork and expectations placed

on stakeholders. SENCOs reported that they were not given enough time to complete lengthy paperwork, which added to their workload and reduced the amount of time spent supporting teachers and students. These descriptions paint a familiar picture to those reported by DTs, who often expressed that time spent completing paperwork took them away from enacting other key duties and making meaningful change. The House of Commons Education Committee (2019) called for increased standardisation of LA's processes and procedures to reduce the 'treacle of bureaucracy', reduce paperwork, simplify processes and increase focus on meeting children's needs (p.18). Likewise, findings from the current and previous research suggest that a review of policy, procedure and paperwork surrounding CLA would support DTs, virtual schools and LAs to meet children's needs.

Funding. Interview and survey participants expressed concerns about inadequate funding for care-experienced children, bureaucratic funding applications, and challenges around using funding effectively. Each virtual school has different processes for releasing funding to schools; while some pass on the full amount, others release set amounts following justification from PEPs, and in some cases, virtual schools will retain funding for strategic purposes (DfE, 2015; NAVSH, 2018). Some participants expressed frustration at the level of justification needed to access funding, and variation in procedure made it difficult for DTs to provide consistent support for CLA. Many felt that provision should be needs-led, rather than constrained by funding caps, as each child needed different levels of support. Adequate funding is essential for facilitating positive change for care-experienced children, but perceptions about a lack of funding has been reiterated by DTs in previous literature (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Simpson, 2012; Waterman, 2020). Recently, Sebba and Berridge (2019) raised concerns that little was known about how PP+ funding was spent, or the

effectiveness of interventions that funding was used on. Read et al. (2020) emphasised that quality PEPs and effective multiagency working played a central role in meaningful funding allocation, however, concerns were raised that funding was not always used to specifically support CLA, but was used to meet budget gaps in education and care. These experiences were reflected in the current and previous research, whereby DTs expressed that funding was not ringfenced and could be absorbed into the general school budget unless carefully monitored (Waterman, 2020). In line with recommendations from Read et al. (2020), findings from the current study indicate that greater guidance is needed about how to use PP+ effectively, including the identification of evidence-based interventions and training for DTs and professionals.

Sense of Effectiveness

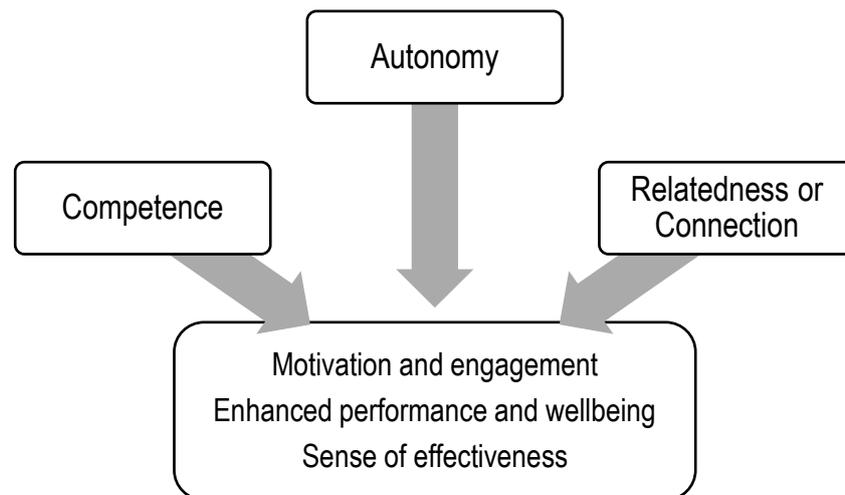
Despite challenges in their role, three-quarters of DTs surveyed felt effective. Effectiveness was conceptualised as the extent to which DTs felt they had met their duties or done a good job. Although no research to date has explored DTs' effectiveness, Simpson (2012) explored their sense of confidence and found the wide majority of DTs reported high levels of confidence in relation to supporting CLA's academic attainment and emotional wellbeing. Simpson (2012) suggested that high confidence could be linked to DTs' self-efficacy, sense of control and resilience, arguing that confident DTs were more likely to believe in their abilities, believe that they were responsible for their success, and recover quickly from difficulties.

In survey and interview findings from the current study, key factors influencing DTs' sense of effectiveness included children's academic and wellbeing outcomes, feedback, connections with others, understanding and meeting children's needs, and

meeting statutory duties (see *DT's sense of Effectiveness* in survey findings and the interview subtheme *Measuring Impact and 'Making a Difference'*). To understand how these factors influenced DTs' sense of effectiveness, principles related to self-determination theory were applied (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-determination theory posits that individuals are driven by a need to grow and gain fulfilment; in order to achieve psychological growth, three psychological needs must be met: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Applied to the current study, for DTs to feel effective in their role and motivated to enact their duties purposefully, they needed to experience competence, autonomy, and connection (see *Figure 19*).

Figure 19

Framework of Self-Determination Theory Adapted from Ryan and Deci (2017)



Competence refers to learning skills, gaining knowledge or understanding, and mastering tasks (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This suggests that when DTs felt they were equipped with the knowledge and skills to enact their role, they were more likely to make active steps to achieve their goals, resulting in a sense of effectiveness. Indeed, participants in the current study explained that when they understood and could meet the needs of care-experienced children, they felt effective. This included have a strong

foundation of knowledge about CLA and the impact of attachment or trauma, implementing appropriate interventions in school, and helping staff/senior leaders to understand the needs of care-experienced children. Alongside the knowledge and skills to support students, DTs felt competent and effective when children made progress, both academically and emotionally; however, this meant that when intervention or support was not having the desired impact, DTs' sense of effectiveness (and competence) could decline. To measure the academic and emotional progress of CLA, participants relied on feedback, which has been identified as increasing an individual's sense of competence and enhance motivation and performance (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Designated teachers expressed that receiving feedback helped them to recognise when they were enacting their role effectively; feedback could be formal or informal, from a range of stakeholders including pupils, parents/carers, school staff, virtual schools, and wider agencies.

Autonomy refers to the freedom to take control of actions that will result in change (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the current study, DTs felt effective when they had the freedom to complete their administrative and operational duties (such as meeting deadlines, completing paperwork, and attending meetings), as well as when they had the authority to make decisions that helped facilitate change in school. Moreover, aspects of the role they had less control over caused greater frustration, such as bureaucratic processes or a lack of standardisation in paperwork. Having autonomy over their work and in their role appeared to help DTs feel in control of their actions and goals, influencing their sense of effectiveness. Designated teachers expressed a desire for their role to have more authority, influence, and status in schools as it was linked to their ability (or inability) to enact change; this indicates that autonomy played an important role in their sense of effectiveness. Yet, regardless of whether DTs had

seniority or autonomy in their school, participants reflected that they were not always able to predict or control outcomes for CLA due to wider complexities in their lives. Because DTs were only one of many professionals involved with CLA, interview participants expressed that it was important to recognise the wider context when evaluating their effectiveness. As such, alongside autonomy was the ability to accept which aspects of the DT role were in and out of their control.

Relatedness refers to the need to experience a sense of belonging and connection to others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Designated teachers reported that building relationships and connections with others was central to their role and was used by many as a measure of effectiveness. This included relationships with children, parents/carers, teachers, social workers, professionals, and virtual schools. Designated teachers reported that, as well as acting as a measure of effectiveness, the strength of their social connections could ease some of the challenges faced in their role. Relatedness also refers to a need to feel part of a group, providing further evidence that opportunities to network with other DTs may be beneficial for developing identity as well as a sense of effectiveness.

Overall, Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory provides a useful framework for understanding DTs' sense of effectiveness. By recognising the factors that can impact DTs' roles, greater support structures can be identified and implemented to help these professionals effectively enact their duties. For example, ensuring DTs feel equipped with knowledge, skills and competence through access to ongoing and relevant training opportunities; enabling DTs to experience autonomy by ensuring they have an appropriate level of authority or influence in schools; and giving DTs time to form connections with stakeholders as well as fellow DTs.

5.4. Research Question Three

What barriers and facilitating factors impact how DTs work with other professionals, including virtual schools, social workers, and EPs?

This question explored DTs' experiences working with professionals in the wider system, including factors that impact multiagency working. Survey and interview responses from DTs and virtual school staff will be examined, alongside findings from previous literature and psychological theory.

Multiagency Working

Designated teachers act as a key liaison between multiple services and agencies (DfE, 2018c). Virtual schools and DTs in this and previous research have emphasised that a coordinated, multiagency approach is critical for promoting outcomes for care-experienced children; however, effective joined-up working could be challenging to achieve (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Higgs, 2006). Integrated working between Children's Services was formally established following the Children Act 2004, placing statutory duties on LA's to integrate education, health and care services to support children and families (Walker, 2018). Having a coordinated approach helps ensure that children's holistic needs are seamlessly supported, and practitioners must have clarity about what is required of them individually and work in partnership with others (DfE, 2018d).

Multiagency working is a complex process that can be practically challenging to implement; integrated services rely on clarity around roles and responsibilities, commitment at all levels, mutual trust and respect between stakeholders, clear communication, and strong working relationships between professionals (Atkinson et al., 2007; Townsley et al., 2004); however, this requires change at multiple levels of

the system: individually, within organisations, and between services (Sloper, 2004). Calls for increased role clarity and opportunities for multiagency training have been voiced by DTs throughout the literature in an attempt to improve joined-up working (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Higgs, 2006; Waterman, 2020). However, responses from participants in the current study highlighted that there are ongoing issues related to effective and timely communication between services that impact collaboration and support for care-experienced children.

Working with Virtual Schools

Statutory guidance outlines that virtual schools are expected to establish working relationships with all professionals involved in the education of CLA, particularly DTs (DfE, 2018b; NAVSH, 2018). Encouragingly, survey responses from virtual schools emphasised the centrality of fostering relationships with DTs and developing clear lines of communication between schools and professionals. Previous research has highlighted that virtual schools were well-placed to coordinate communication between education and care (Driscoll, 2013), acting as a ‘bridge’ between the two systems (Simpson, 2012; p.188). Furthermore, the most effective virtual schools have been identified as ones that work closely with stakeholders to promote an integrated, multiagency approach and improve awareness about each professionals’ role remit (Ofsted, 2012).

Designated teachers in the current study generally reported positive experiences with virtual schools. Effective virtual schools were described as working collaboratively and in partnership with schools, and actively involved in the process of supporting DTs and CLA. Presence during PEPs and availability throughout the term for practical guidance and support were appreciated, both in the current study and

previous research (Simpson, 2012; Waterman, 2020). Designated teachers recognised that virtual schools were there to act as a critical friend and maintain accountability, but as outlined with the subtheme *Fostering a Reciprocal Relationship with the Virtual School*, having a strong working relationship at the foundation was an essential prerequisite. Jackson (2015) argued that virtual schools held a strategic role, and their core function was to support schools in raising CLA's achievement by holding schools to account for children's outcomes. While strategic oversight is important for raising the profile of care-experienced children (Sebba & Berridge, 2019), when virtual schools focused too firmly on holding schools to account, and less on relationships and collaboration, DTs did not feel supported in their role. Strong relationships between virtual schools and DTs have been recognised as a key factor in promoting positive outcomes for care-experienced children (Rivers, 2018; Sebba & Berridge, 2019; Simpson, 2012). Both DTs and virtual school staff in the current study reflected that it could be challenging to form strong connections when working across different boroughs; yet many DTs reported building strong, reciprocal relationships with their virtual schools, whereby virtual schools were recognised as being the champion for DTs in the same way the DTs were advocates for care-experienced children.

Working with Educational Psychologists

Approximately two-thirds of DTs surveyed worked with an EP in their role. While McParlin (1996) argued that EPs are well-positioned to support CLA, Whitehouse (2014) and Norwich et al. (2010) found that EPs often relied on schools to raise CLA as a concern; however, once EPs were involved, they played a central role in ensuring the voice of the child was kept at the centre of decision-making. Most DTs surveyed in the current study felt that EP input was relevant to their role; however, some explained that advice was primarily sought when there were concerns about academic

progress. Similarly, Whitehouse's (2014) DTs recognised the specialist knowledge that EPs could provide, however EPs were more likely to be consulted for learning support, while other services would be sought to address SEMH needs. While EPs are well-placed to support children's SEMH needs, schools tend to lack clarity about what EPs can offer and how they work, which can limit EPs contributions (Norwich et al., 2010). Additionally, Norwich et al. (2010) reported that consultation was the most common way EPs worked with DTs, however Whitehouse (2014) concluded the DTs did not always value or understand the process of consultation as a model of service delivery. Consultation was recognised by DTs in the current study as a useful and commonly utilised tool, yet greater value was placed on individual level support, such as assessment, observation and EHCP contributions.

Educational psychologists have been recognised as being well-placed to work at an organisational level and increase stakeholders' understanding about the needs of, and support for, care-experienced children (Norwich et al., 2010; Whitehouse, 2014). However, only a small number of DTs in the current survey reported using EPs for systemic support such as training or policy development. In contrast, over half of virtual schools in the survey commissioned EPs to deliver training for DTs and wider stakeholders, indicating that the EP role in supporting CLA may be positioned at a more strategic level by virtual schools (through training), but at an individual level for DTs (through direct assessment and individual consultation). Additionally, although several participants in the current study identified supervision as a beneficial area of support for DTs, few acknowledged that this could be a role that EPs could undertake. The importance of supporting staff wellbeing was raised by virtual schools in Simpson's (2012) study due to the emotional demands that working with CLA could have, however opportunities for debriefing and supervision were rare. Similarly, Goodall

(2014) reported that DTs rarely received emotional support, concluding that EP supervision could help DTs reflect on their actions or feelings which could help them manage the complexities of their role. This was echoed in the current research where numerous DTs reflected on the cathartic nature of the interview, highlighting the benefit that reflective supervision could provide DTs. Supervision for school staff can have a significant impact on teachers' commitment and efficacy (Ebmeier, 2003), and EPs have been identified as holding a key role in facilitating effective supervision for school staff (Turner & Gulliford, 2020; Waterman, 2020). Ultimately, EPs are well-placed to provide support for care-experienced children and DTs, however it is important that they clarify the range of work they can offer schools to make effective contributions (Norwich et al., 2010).

Working with Mental Health Services

While establishing links with mental health professionals helped DTs develop a holistic understanding of care-experienced children, participants expressed that many children were still waiting to access the support they needed. Indeed, mental health services across the country are stretched, and access to timely support are impacted by high referral rates, long wait times and prohibitive eligibility thresholds (Care Quality Commission, 2017, 2018). Only one-in-four children with a mental health need had contact with a mental health specialist in 2017 (Sadler et al., 2017), and between 2018-2019, over one-quarter of referrals to specialist mental health services were rejected, most commonly because they did not meet the high eligibility thresholds (Crenna-Jennings & Hutchinson, 2020); yet few alternative services are available for lower threshold support, and long wait times can increase the severity of mental health needs (Edbrooke-Childs & Deighton, 2020). These findings validate DTs' concerns that children were not receiving timely support.

Concerns raised by DTs in the current study indicated that access to timely mental health support remained a significant issue (see *Key Challenges faced by DTs* in survey findings and the interview subtheme *Difficulties with Joined-up Working*). Several participants expressed that schools had become the frontline for children's mental health, however a lack of resources and funding for pastoral support in schools left teachers feeling under-skilled and overstretched. The past decade has seen increasing expectations placed on schools to identify and support students' mental health needs (Frith, 2016; Graham et al., 2011) and teachers themselves felt well-placed to support students' mental health (Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015; Shelemy et al., 2019); however, insufficient teacher training on children's mental health left many feeling a lack of specialist knowledge or skills to support effectively (Shepherd et al., 2013). Calls for increased training on mental health have been raised throughout the literature to equip teachers with the tools and confidence to offer preventative support (Danby & Hamilton, 2016; Graham et al., 2011; Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015; Shelemy et al., 2019). Following the Green Paper on *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision* (DoH & DfE, 2017), the government pledged to increase mental health support in schools by training designated mental health leads, funding mental health support teams to provide early intervention for students' mental health, and reducing waiting times for specialist services. While it is encouraging that the government have recognised schools as being frontline support for children's mental health, some have argued that the proposals are not ambitious enough, need greater investment, and may inadvertently place additional pressure on overloaded services and under-resourced schools (Cox & McDonald, 2020; England & Mughal, 2019).

Moreover, research continues to highlight that care-experienced children are at greater risk of poor mental health than peers (DfE, 2020c; Tarren-Sweeney, 2008). Prevalence rates for CLA with mental health needs and diagnosable disorders have been estimated at between 45-49% of the care population (Ford et al., 2007) compared to around 12.8% of all children (Sadler et al., 2017). Participants in the current study emphasised that greater support was needed for care-experienced children's SEMH needs, to support attainment, wellbeing, and future life outcomes. However, Tarren-Sweeney (2010) argued that mental health services in their current form do not necessarily fit the needs of CLA. The author explained that mental health services are often expected to achieve a high turnover of cases, with a focus on acute and severe needs; CLA benefit from preventative support with ongoing engagement and monitoring. To effectively support CLA, Tarren-Sweeney (2010) called for mental health services to increase their knowledge, skills and specialisation in complex attachment and trauma-related needs, alongside strengthened government policy that advocates for 'whole of government' accountability for care-experienced children's mental health (p.623).

Working with Social Care

Designated teachers in surveys and interviews reported mixed experiences working with social care, due to concerns about communication, contact and capacity. It is widely recognised that social care services are overstretched and under-resourced; heavy caseloads, high turnover, overly bureaucratic systems and insufficient training and support have all contributed to a national shortage of consistent social workers (Baginsky, 2013; DfE, 2019a; MacAlister et al., 2012; Ravalier, 2018). High staff turnover can impact the consistency of support between social workers and the children, families and wider professionals they interact with

(Bowyer & Roe, 2015); in the current study, when communication was consistent, DTs reported that experiences with social care greatly improved, however frequent staff changes made it difficult for children and schools to build relationships with social workers. While DTs have acknowledged the organisational pressures faced by social workers, insufficient communication and consistency within social care were seen as having a detrimental impact on CLA's outcomes (Berridge et al., 2009; Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Ofsted, 2012). A review by Moriarty, Baginsky and Manthorpe (2015) highlighted that social workers were often expected to perform numerous roles, but the boundaries between roles could be blurred; as a result, other professionals did not always have clarity around the distinctive contribution of social work, which could lead to negative perceptions about social care (Baginsky, 2014). This perceived lack of clarity around role expectations and remits was felt by participants in the current study, as well as DTs in previous literature (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Higgs, 2006), highlighting a need for greater role clarity between professional when working across multiple systems.

Working Within and Between Systems

Designated teachers in the current study explained that each LA, virtual school, and social care system worked differently, resulting in a lack of consistency in how each stakeholder enacted their roles (see interview theme *Negotiating Challenges in the Wider System*). This could lead to frustration and confusion about who was responsible for undertaking certain duties. Principles relating to *systems theory* (Miller & Rice, 1967) can be used to explore DTs' experiences of working in different systems, which posits that different organisations function as systems, made up of multiple subsystems (Roberts, 2019). As such, schools, virtual schools, and social care services operate as individual systems, but also form part of a wider LA system. While

each organisation has its own boundaries, aims, or objectives, multiple interactions and exchanges can occur between different systems to help meet their goals (Obholzer & Roberts, 2019). Individuals with multiple roles, like DTs, can often work within and between wider systems (i.e. school *and* social care), but in order to feel effective, clarity is needed about where system boundaries are, and how their role is contributing to the groups' overall objectives (Roberts, 2019). However, conflicting definitions about roles and expectations can lead to uncertainty about roles and whether group members are enacting their duties effectively (Roberts, 1994). If DTs and social workers are inadvertently working towards different goals in a meeting, this may explain the frustration felt by each stakeholder.

It could be argued that DTs sit at the boundary of school systems, making decisions and taking actions that influence engagement with wider systems (i.e., communicating with social care, initiating interactions with external agencies, and working with school). As systems interact and the complexity of organisational structures increase, DTs must rely on their own understanding of their role to work effectively (Roberts, 2019). This becomes increasingly complex when working with multiple LAs and social workers, as each system comes with its own expectations about roles and goals, and tension can occur when others interpret roles or boundaries differently. Reed (2001) described this tension as the discrepancy between an individual's psychological role (the role as internalised by the individual) and their sociological role (the role as viewed by others). Assumptions from others can place pressure on individuals to conform to the sociological perspective, which can contribute to a sense of uncertainty or anxiety around whether they are enacting their role effectively (Obholzer & Roberts, 2019). While increasing role clarity and generating a joint understanding about expectations can help reduce tension and

uncertainty about responsibilities, Reed (2001) suggested that meaningful change comes from a shared acceptance that roles are dynamic and individuals must be flexible to changing contexts.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Overview

This chapter outlines the main conclusions from the current research, discusses limitations of the study, and provides recommendations and implications for practice.

6.2. Conclusions

Designated teachers are central to the promotion of positive outcomes for care-experienced children. This research aimed to explore the role of DTs and gain deeper insight into their lived experiences.

Research question one explored statutory recommendations about the DT role, and how these related to DT practice. Most DTs reported that they were able to dedicate around one day per week to their role, but many expressed that they needed more time to enact duties effectively. Time needed for the role varied depending on a range of factors, including school size and setting, the number and type of additional roles held by DTs, the number of care-experienced children in school, and children's individual level of need. Numerous DTs reported unexpectedly inheriting their role, rather than actively applying for the position, and despite training for DTs being a statutory requirement, one-third had not received initial training, learning 'on the job' instead. Although most DTs held leadership positions, many raised concerns about the level of recognition or status DTs had in schools, and while DTs recognised that their statutory duties extended to previously looked after children, there was uncertainty about how schools might best identify and support these students.

Statutory regulations provide a framework to guide DT practice, and there was considerable variation in how DTs enacted their roles depending on school size, setting, the number of care-experienced children, access to training, and positions of

seniority. Despite holding an integral role in promoting outcomes for care-experienced children, it appears that DTs were not always given the time, training, recognition, or resources needed to comfortably enact their role. To achieve positive outcomes for care-experienced children, there needs to be greater acknowledgement and support for these professionals who are responsible for enabling change to happen.

Research question two explored barriers and facilitating factors impacting how DTs experienced and enacted their role, including key challenges and support that could mitigate against challenges, and factors impacting DTs' sense of effectiveness. Findings highlighted that time and workload were key challenges for DTs. The time-intensive role meant DTs did not always have the capacity to devote to their duties amid multiple responsibilities. Greater recognition from senior leaders about the time needed to enact the role effectively, and protected time in their timetables to undertake key duties could mitigate these challenges, as well as sharing the role or delegating duties to other staff.

Role awareness, status and recognition were additional challenges raised. Findings highlighted a general lack of awareness about the DT role in schools; staff and senior leaders did not always recognise the role's function or importance, and many DTs felt the role lacked influence and status to enact change effectively. To mitigate against negative perceptions about how their role was recognised and understood by others, and to support DTs in developing a secure role identity, networking opportunities were identified as a useful mechanism for enabling DTs to connect with others, share experiences, reflect on practice, and deepen their understanding about the role.

Additionally, staff engagement and understanding about the needs of care-experienced children impacted DTs' experiences. While many school staff were supportive advocates for care-experienced children, variation was reported in how empathetic or understanding staff were. Training on attachment-aware and trauma-informed approaches helped deepen staff awareness about children's needs, however effective implementation of school-wide approaches needed careful planning and monitoring over time, emphasising the importance of having DTs in senior positions to support whole-school change.

Challenges also included managing bureaucracy and administration. A lack of consistency in process, procedure and role expectations between different authorities impacted how DTs enacted their duties. Designated teachers expressed a particular desire for greater standardisation in PEP process and procedure, and a review of the information required for paperwork to make processes more meaningful. This included greater guidance about how to use funding effectively and the identification of evidence-based intervention to promote children's outcomes.

Encouragingly around three-quarters of DTs reported feeling effective in their role. Designated teachers' sense of effectiveness was influenced by children's academic and wellbeing outcomes, feedback, connections with others, understanding and meeting children's needs, and meeting statutory duties. These factors were applied to Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination theory, suggesting that for DTs to feel effective in their role and motivated to enact their duties purposefully, they need to experience a sense of competence, autonomy and connection.

Research question three explored DTs' experiences working with professionals in the wider system and factors impacting multiagency working. A

coordinated and collaborative approach was essential for promoting children's outcomes, and DTs acted as a key liaison between social care, virtual schools, and wider professionals. However, effective joined-up working could be challenging to achieve and relied on timely communication and regular contact between services. Building relationships and establishing links with key agencies and individuals supported DTs in their role, however overstretched and under-resourced mental health and social care services made it challenging to maintain consistent contact.

Because DTs worked with multiple agencies and systems, it was important to have clarity about role boundaries and expectations between professionals; however, DTs explained that because each LA worked differently, there was a lack of consistency in how each stakeholder enacted their roles, leading to confusion or frustration about who was responsible for undertaking certain responsibilities. This could be mitigated by developing greater consistency between LA's systems, increasing awareness about the DT role, and generating a shared understanding about expectations between professionals through joint training.

6.3. Limitations

While this research has contributed knowledge and insight about the role and experiences of DTs to the limited body of literature in this area, limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the DT sample may not be representative of the wider population, and because the research findings have been drawn from a sample that included virtual school staff with a range of job titles, and DTs across different stages of education and school type, the homogeneity of the sample could be questioned. Despite variation in the sample, responses were largely consistent – both within the sample and in relation

to previous research on the perspectives of DTs and virtual schools – supporting the transferability of findings (Fletcher-Campbell et al., 2003; Goodall, 2014; Hayden, 2005; Higgs, 2006; Simpson, 2012; Waterman, 2020). Furthermore, the voluntary and self-selecting nature of the research may have influenced the sample and response rate. Motivations for participation are unknown, and virtual schools or DTs who were more engaged with their roles, had more time to take part in research opportunities, or were affected by particularly negative (or positive) experiences with the systems may have been more motivated to participate. However, responses aligned closely with previous research, giving confidence in the results.

Limitations around data collection methods must also be acknowledged. While telephone interviews were logistically more convenient, particularly during social distancing measures, a lack of visual cues to guide interviews may have impacted rapport and the depth of answers (Robson & McCartan, 2016). It is hoped that these limitations were mitigated by the interviewer's skill and ethical considerations towards ensuring participants' ease. Additionally, online surveys relied on self-reports and data may have been affected by respondents' memory, knowledge, motivation, and social desirability. However, ensuring anonymity hoped to encourage participants to be honest and open about their experiences (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Finally, findings were based on the views and experiences of participants that volunteered, which may limit generalisability, and results may have been affected by the author's own interpretation of data. This effect was minimised by adhering to guidelines for successful thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), double-coding themes with a group of trainee EPs during research supervision, and maintaining transparency by keeping a clear and transparent record of research activities (see *Appendix E* for an example transcript and coding categories). Moreover, a mixed-

methods approach enabled the triangulation of qualitative findings with quantitative results from a wider sample, increasing the credibility of findings (Bryman, 2012). Future research could consider the experiences of other stakeholders (e.g. health/care professionals, parents/carers, care-experienced children) to gain a holistic view of issues raised.

6.4. Implications for Practice

Based on research findings, implications for practice can be suggested for virtual schools and DTs, as well as EPs. It is hoped that by supporting and strengthening the DT role, holistic outcomes for care-experienced children can be improved.

To raise the profile of care-experienced children, more needs to be done to raise the profile of DTs. This would involve increasing awareness and recognition about the DT role in schools and among professionals, including social care and EPs. Designated teachers need to have the support of senior leaders to enact change effectively, and the role would benefit from being considered a senior position, rather than an add-on responsibility, to raise the status and influence of DTs. To increase awareness, DTs may need support in publicising their role more widely. Senior leaders, virtual schools and EPs could have a role in supporting role awareness, but this would involve increasing their own knowledge and understanding about factors that challenge and support DTs. For EPs, this could involve discussing the DT role and care-experienced children during school planning meetings, and highlighting the wide-ranging support that EPs can offer (e.g. delivering training on attachment, trauma, or care-experienced children, supporting with policy development or the implementation of attachment-aware and trauma-informed approaches).

Designated teachers often raised concerns about time and workload pressures, and there needs to be greater recognition from senior leaders and governing bodies about the time DTs need to enact their role effectively. A fixed amount of time allocated to the role might not always be feasible or appropriate, but set time for the role should be considered in relation to the number of care-experienced children in school, the individual needs of the children, as well as the individual needs of each DT. Additionally, role-sharing or delegating specific duties could be promoted more by virtual schools and DTs, to reduce workload while simultaneously creating more advocates for care-experienced children in schools.

To be effective advocates for care-experienced children, DTs need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and emotional support to enact duties confidently. Crucially, decisions around assigning the role should be considered carefully by governing bodies and in consultation with prospective DTs, to ensure that individuals are aware of their expectations. It may be beneficial for virtual schools to provide access to more online training (and networking) opportunities to enable DTs to attend flexibly, share experiences and develop a deeper understanding of their role. Virtual schools should consult regularly with DTs to identify relevant and useful training, and EPs can play a role in co-delivering training with virtual schools. Providing supervision for DTs may be another tool EPs could use to support the emotional demands of the role – delivered individually or in groups.

Designated teachers found it challenging to identify previously looked after children and expressed uncertainty about these statutory expectations. It is important that these children receive the support they are eligible for; it may be useful for virtual schools and LAs to provide more support around developing centralised systems for monitoring previously looked after children, rather than placing the onus on DTs alone.

Additionally, DTs would benefit from practical guidance on how to support previously looked after children, including best-practice case studies and evidence-based interventions and support that can be implemented in schools.

Finally, virtual schools, LAs and policy makers should consider a nationwide consultation with DTs to address the bureaucratic challenges caused by a lack of consistency and standardisation in paperwork, process, and procedure between counties. Consultation should also address the role expectation discrepancies, which could be mitigated by greater access to joint training between DTs, social workers, and wider professionals.

Key Messages for EPs

Educational psychologists play an important role in supporting and promoting outcomes for CLA: by supporting and promoting the work of DTs. Like DTs, EPs sit within and between multiple systems and must learn to navigate and interact with individuals and services from across education, health, and care. Educational psychologists can therefore offer unique insight into the challenges that DTs face when negotiating different systems and are well-placed to support DTs in their role. Findings from this research have highlighted several key steps that EPs can take to support DTs in practice:

- Know who the DTs are in school and make active steps to promote and prioritise work related to care-experienced children during planning meetings.
- Ask DTs about the current challenges they face and what helps them in their role. Consider and apply Deci and Ryan's (1985) *Self Determination Theory* to identify how to promote DTs' sense of effectiveness by identifying resources and support that enhance their *competence, autonomy and connection*.

- Remind school staff about the range of work that EPs can offer, which includes much more than learning-based individual assessment, consultation, and observation. Promote systemic work with a focus on attachment aware or trauma-informed approaches, such as wider training for school staff (which could be delivered jointly with DTs) or developing and implementing relationship-based behaviour policies.
- Ask about CLA *and* previously looked after children. Remind schools about the additional support, provision and funding that previously looked after children are eligible for and help schools to identify evidence-based intervention and support for these children.
- Where possible, attend children's PEP meetings to support DTs and wider stakeholders in identifying evidence-based intervention and provision for CLA. Ensure that discussions are informed by key psychological frameworks or theory to help deepen the holistic understanding about children's strengths, needs and behaviour.
- Offer supervision to DTs and emphasise the benefit and purpose of supervision sessions. Help DTs to reflect on their role, responsibilities, thoughts, feelings, and decisions in a containing space, which can encourage DTs to deepen their understanding of the role and their position within different systems.
- Promote strong connections with the virtual school within each LA. Enquire about specific training needs within the DT community and offer support during training, networking events or through supervision, where appropriate.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Findings from the Small-Scale Research Project

Deciphering roles and building relationships: Designated Teacher and school staff perspectives on promoting outcomes for Children Looked After (CLA).

September 2019

1. Background

In England, approximately 75,420 Children Looked After (CLA) have entered LA care for a variety of reasons, including neglect and abuse, family dysfunction and acute family stress (Department for Education, 2018b). These experiences can have a significant impact the physical, emotional and cognitive development of children, and CLA have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group in society, showing consistently poorer outcomes compared to peers across academic attainment, social, emotional and mental health, and future life protectories (Jackson, 2013).

Statutory support for CLA

The statutory designated teacher (DT) role was established following the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, requiring all schools to allocate a DT responsible for promoting and monitoring the educational achievement of CLA (Department for Education, 2018d). Despite their integral role in supporting CLA and mediating between education and social care, there appears to be little research on DTs' experiences in supporting CLA, revealing a need for further research in the area.

Strategies for supporting CLA

- **One-to-one tuition** has been highlighted as an effective strategy for supporting attainment, particularly in primary students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Berridge et al., 2009; Education Endowment Foundation, 2018).
- **Mentoring** involves a 'caring and supportive relationship between a youth and non-parental adult' (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006, p. 692). By providing children with a consistent and caring adult, mentoring can act as a protective factor for CLA.
- **The PALAC project:** Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) is a knowledge exchange programme for supporting CLA outcomes. The current study explored a PALAC programme run in collaboration with one virtual school that combined one-to-one tutoring with mentoring for CLA.

2. The Current Study

Aims

To extend and deepen understanding about the perceived impact of the PALAC project, the current study aimed to explore the experiences of DTs and tutors who were involved in this years' cycle of the intervention. The current project had two broad aims:

1. To explore DTs perceptions of their role, including key responsibilities, highlights, challenges and improvements;
2. To explore DT and tutor experiences of the current PALAC project, including strengths, challenges and future outlook.

Participants

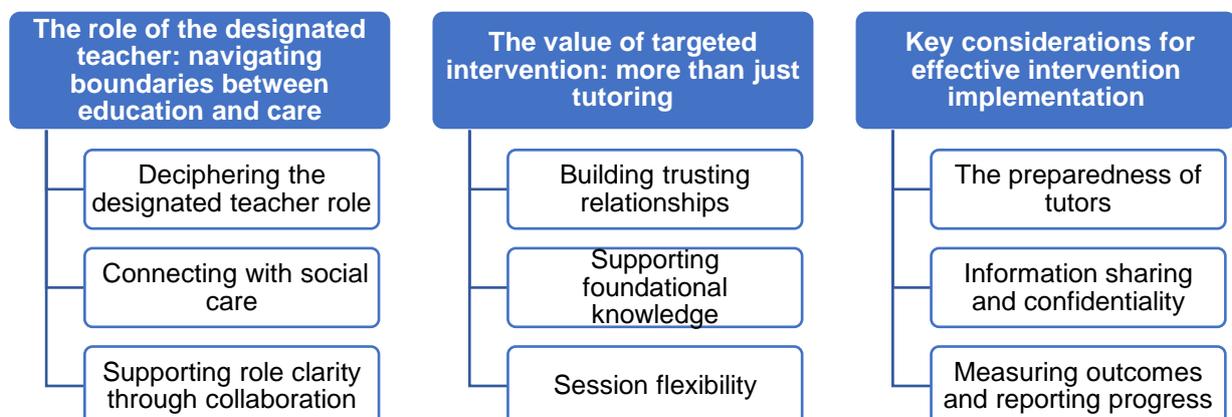
Details of the study were circulated by email to DTs and PALAC tutors who were involved in the PALAC knowledge exchange project. Six DTs (6 female) and four PALAC tutors (2 female; 2 male) participated in the study. Designated teachers' experience ranged from 2 to 10 years. PALAC tutors were made up of one class teachers and three teaching assistants, with PALAC experience ranging from 1 to 2 years.

Method

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of DTs and teaching staff who were involved in the PALAC knowledge exchange project linked to the virtual school within one LA. Results were analysed using data-driven thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants were questioned about their role and responsibilities, as well as their reflection on this year's PALAC intervention (what works well, challenges, perceived impact and potential improvements).

3. Results

Thematic analysis of responses, using a data-driven, inductive approach, elicited three key themes: the role of the designated teacher: navigating boundaries between education and care; the value of targeted intervention for CLA: more than just tutoring; and key considerations for effective intervention implementation.



Key Findings

The first theme explored *the role of the designated teacher: navigating boundaries between education and care*. While recognised as being a defined role, DTs did not always see a distinction between their DT role and their additional duties; a lack of clear distinctiveness could sometimes create feelings of uncertainty around role boundaries, and could ultimately influence their sense of effectiveness as a DT. Additionally, DTs explained that *connecting with social care* was challenging when lines of communication were not clear. Participants expressed that communication challenges were not the fault of any individual, but rather a symptom of systemic issues facing the social care system, including high staff turnover for social workers and over-stretched or under-resourced services. Ultimately, DTs explained that training and networking forums organised by the virtual school provided opportunities to gain knowledge, share experiences and problem-solve, thus *increasing role clarity through collaboration*.

The second theme focussed on *the value of targeted intervention for CLA: more than just tutoring*. Participants emphasised that *building relationships* was fundamental to the intervention; sessions created opportunities for tutors and children to bond, share and build a sense of trust. Additionally, tutors expressed that many of their CLA had experienced loss of learning as a result of missing school; sessions were used to identify and meet these learning needs by *supporting foundational knowledge*. Finally, tutors valued *session flexibility* as it enabled time to provide children with emotional support before commencing academic work; Once emotional needs were addressed, tutors reflected that the learning process became easier.

The final theme outlined *key considerations for effective intervention implementation*. Participants reflected that planning and training were crucial aspects of the intervention as *the preparedness of tutors* could impact on the delivery of sessions. Additionally, participants explained that finding the right balance between adequate *information sharing and confidentiality* was an important consideration when working with CLA. Tutors expressed that greater awareness of children's care situations were important for supporting practical safeguarding measures and providing emotional support. Finally, participants reflected that *measuring outcomes and reporting progress* could be challenging, particularly 'softer' outcomes relating to emotional development, relationship building or confidence as a learner.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how schools within one virtual school helped support outcomes for CLA by investigating the role of DTs and the experiences of school staff in implementing a mentoring/tuition intervention. Findings highlighted DTs perceptions and reflections on their position within the education and social care systems, emphasising the need for greater role clarity and support for these professionals. Additionally, school staff reflected on their involvement in the PALAC mentoring/tuition intervention, emphasising that the relationship building aspect of the project was central to supporting holistic outcomes for CLA. In light of the findings, extension and continuation of intervention is recommended, in addition to ongoing research on the role of DTs.

Appendix B: Literature Review Search Strategy

In order to conduct a thorough and systematic review of relevant literature, a number of academic research databases and search engines were used to explore existing research in relation to the role of designated teachers, as well as identify any gaps in the literature that may need addressing. In consideration of the dearth of research on the role of designated teachers, broad ranging search questions were used in an attempt to capture all relevant literature.

The search questions were as follows:

1. What current empirical literature exists on the role or experiences of designated teachers or the virtual school?
2. What current grey literature exists on the role or experiences of designated teachers or the virtual school?
3. What policy, legislation or statutory frameworks have influenced the development of the designated teacher role or the virtual school?

The following databases and search engines were used to conduct the systematic literature review, including: the British Education Index (BEI), the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), Scopus, ProQuest, Web of Science, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA); PsychINFO; UCL Explore; and Google Scholar. The search terms included combinations of relevant terms across the following key concepts:

"designated teacher*" OR "virtual school*" AND ("looked after children" OR "lac" OR "foster care" OR "children in care" OR "CIC" OR "out of home care" OR "CLA" OR "child looked after" OR "previously looked after" OR "public care" OR "care experienced")

See *Tables 8, 9 and 10* for an overview of the systematic search results for each of the search questions.

Exclusion and inclusion criteria

The literature search was refined by publication data, to include empirical studies, grey literature and policy or legislation published between 1989 to date, to capture relevant studies associated with key changes in legislation (Children Act, 1989; Children Act, 2004; Children and Families Act, 2014). Where functionally possible, subject or category was used as an inclusion/exclusion tool to screen for disciplines relating to education, psychology, social sciences, or foster care. Only articles published in English were included and all searches across databases were cross-referenced to remove duplicates. Abstracts were reviewed for relevance to research and search questions underpinning the current study. Because of the limited published literature in the area, 'grey' literature, including unpublished articles, doctoral

theses and independent reports were also included in the search. Relevant literature within the reference lists of studies were also considered during the review. The quality and relevance of studies were carefully considered before inclusion in the review. To identify relevant documents, a series of questions were developed to guide the researcher in their review of the literature (see below). A point was allocated for each relevance question and a final relevance rating was calculated for each text. Literature with relevance scores of less than one, were excluded from the review.

Relevance questions:

1. Is there relevant information relating to the **development** of the designated teacher role or the virtual school?
2. Is there relevant information relating to the **role and responsibilities** of designated teachers or the virtual school?
3. Is there relevant information relating to the **impact or effectiveness** of designated teachers or the virtual school?
4. Is there relevant information relating to how designated teachers or the virtual school work with other professionals (i.e. **multiagency or joint working**)?
5. Is there relevant information relating to the **views, experiences or perceptions** of designated teachers or the virtual school?

Overview of included search literature

A total of 21 texts from the literature search and six documents from the policy search met the full inclusion criteria (see *Table 11* for details). The final literature texts included: 11 peer reviewed journal articles, one book, six official publications, two research reports, two reports, and five unpublished theses. The following legislation were also included in the review as these act as a framework for understanding the development of the designated teacher role and virtual school: Children Act 1989; Children Act 2004; Green Paper 2006: Care Matters; White Paper 2007: Care Matters; Children and Young Person Act 2008; Children and Families Act 2014; Children and Social Work Act 2017. Research methodology from the selected studies included mixed methods (n= 11), qualitative (n=7) and case studies (n=5), with a range of data collection methods, including interviews, focus groups, observations, questionnaires and statistical analysis of attainment, attendance, and exclusion data. Views were gathered from a range of participants, including designated teachers, virtual school staff, social workers, parents/carers, children and young people and educational psychologists. An overview and of the literature, including an analysis of strengths and limitations, will be described below.

Table 8*Systematic Search Results for Search Question 1*

Search Question 1: What current empirical literature exists on the role or experiences of designated teachers or the virtual school?							
Search Term	Date	Database	Initial results	Exclusions	Refined inclusion terms	Review of abstracts	Final result
"designated teacher*" OR "virtual school*" AND ("looked after child*" or "LAC" or "child* looked after" or "CLA" or "child* previously looked after" or "previously looked after child*" or "child* in care" or "CIC" or "looked-after child*" or "child* looked-after" or "previously looked-after" or "care experienced" or "care-experienced")	27.04.21	British Education Index	9	Papers published before 1989 (8)	Document: empirical literature (6)	Excluded papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	4
	27.04.21	ERIC	23	Papers published before 1989 (18)	Subject: foster care; educational change; student needs; children; educational psychology; educational improvement; educational policy (12)	Excluded papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	3
	27.04.21	Scopus	62	Search title, abstract, key words (12) Papers published before 1989 (12)	Subject: social sciences; psychology (12)	Excluded papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	9
	27.04.21	ProQuest	3813	Search title, abstract, key words (255) Papers published before 1989 (238)	Source: dissertations/theses, scholarly journals, books, reports (88) Subject: education, educational psychology, child welfare, foster care, in care (25) Document: article, books, reports (18)	Excluded duplicates and papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	3
	27.04.21	Web of Science	17	Papers published before 1989 (17)	Categories: education educational research, education scientific disciplines, psychology educational, education special, social work (11)	Excluded duplicates and papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	5
	27.04.21	ASSIA	45	Search title, abstract, key words (9) Papers published before 1989 (9)	Source: scholarly journals (7)	Excluded duplicates and papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	4
	27.04.21	PsycINFO PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA PsycBOOKS	24	Papers published before 1989 (24)	Subject: education, foster care, foster children, child welfare, government policy making, educational psychology (16)	Excluded papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	2
	27.04.21	Google Scholar	252	Papers published before 1989 (231)	Exact phrase: "designated teacher" (36)	Excluded papers scoring <1 in relevance criteria*	2

Table 9*Systematic Search Results for Search Question 2*

Search Question 2: What current grey literature exists on the role or experiences of designated teachers or the virtual school?							
Search Term	Date	Database	Initial results	Exclusions	Refined inclusion terms	Review of abstracts	Final result
"designated teacher*" OR "virtual school*" AND ("looked after child*" or "LAC" or "child* looked after" or "CLA" or "child* previously looked after" or "previously looked after child*" or "child* in care" or "CIC" or "looked-after child*" or "child* looked-after" or "previously looked-after")	27.04.21	British Education Index	9	Papers published before 1989 (8)	Document: grey literature (2)	Excluded papers that scored <1 in relevance criteria*	1
	27.04.21	ERIC	23	Papers published before 1989 (18)	Document: grey literature (1)	Excluded papers that scored <1 in relevance criteria*	1
	27.04.21	ProQuest	3813	Search title, abstract, key words (255) Papers published before 1989 (238)	Source: dissertations/theses, scholarly journals, books, reports (88) Subject: education, educational psychology, child welfare, foster care, in care (25) Document: dissertations/theses (7)	Excluded duplicates and papers that scored <1 in relevance criteria*	5
	27.04.21	Google Scholar	252	Papers published before 1989 (231)	Exact phrase: "designated teacher" (36)	Excluded papers that scored <1 in relevance criteria*	8

Table 10*Systematic Search Results for Search Question 3*

Search Question 3: What policy, legislation or statutory frameworks have influenced the development of the designated teacher role or the virtual school?							
Search Term	Date	Database	Initial results	Exclusions	Refined inclusion terms	Review of abstracts	Final result
"designated teacher" OR "virtual school" OR "public care" AND "official publication"	27.04.21	UCL Explore	10,808	Papers published before 1989 (10,240)	Document: official publication (8)	Excluded papers that scored <1 in relevance criteria*	6

Table 11
Overview of Final Texts Included in the Literature Review

No.	Title	Text Type	Objective / purpose	Method	Data collection methods	R* Score	Strengths and Limitations
1.	Berridge, D. (2012). Reflections on Child Welfare Research and the Policy Process: Virtual School Heads and the Education of Looked After Children. <i>British Journal of Social Work</i> , 42(1), 26-41.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Commentary on the virtual school pilot and the relationship between policy research and policy making.	n/a	n/a	3	Provides a useful overview of the political context within which the virtual school initiative was developed. Includes a critical reflection of the virtual school pilot that was evaluated by Berridge et al. (2009).
2.	Berridge, D., Henry, L., Jackson, S., and Turney, D. (2009). <i>Looked after and learning: evaluation of the virtual school head pilot</i> . London: Department for Schools and Families.	Official publication	Evaluation of the virtual school pilot.	Mixed methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of attainment data. • Questionnaires and interviews with VHSs (n=11). • Interviews with children's services directors (n=5). • Interviews with SWs (n=39). • Web-based surveys of CLA (n=31), carers (n=25), DTs (n=21), SWs (n=10) 	4	Key conclusion: virtual school model had potential to improve the school experience and educational outcomes of CLA – provided justification for rolling out the model to the rest of the country. Includes useful information about the role of DTs, VS and multiagency working from interview data.
3.	Connelly, G., Siebelt, L., and Furnivall, J. (2008). <i>Supporting looked after children and young people at school: a Scottish perspective</i> . Glasgow: University of Strathclyde.	Research report	Explores the experiences of children in care in Scotland, including an exploration of the role of the designated teacher.	Case study	Interviews with designated teachers (n=11)	4	Small scale case study. Limitations: Scottish context could limit transferability; only one cluster of schools (n=8).
4.	Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for looked after children: statutory guidance for school governing bodies. London: Crown copyright.	Official publication	Guidance published after the designated teacher role became statutory, following the Children and Young Person Act, 2008.	n/a	n/a	2	Outlines the key roles and responsibilities for designated teachers, following the role becoming statutory.
5.	Department for Education (2018). The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children: Statutory guidance on their roles and responsibilities. London: Crown Copyright.	Official publication	Updated guidance on the role of designated teachers, that includes support for previously looked after children.	n/a	n/a	2	Outlines the duties of designated teachers in more detail. Most up-to-date guidance on the role.
6.	Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health (2000). Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care. London: Crown Copyright.	Official publication	Guidance to assist LAs in their role as corporate parents to safeguard and promote the education of children looked after.	n/a	n/a	3	Recommended every school to appoint a designated teacher, before the role became statutory. Includes implications for practice, including joint working between education and social care.
7.	Drew, H. and Banerjee, R. (2019). Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-	Journal article	Explores the role of the virtual school in	Mixed methods	Online survey of virtual school heads (n=29).	5	A recent piece of research that explores the VSH role since it has been made a statutory position.

	after: what is the role of the virtual school? <i>European Journal of Psychology of Education</i> , 34(1), 101-121.	Peer Reviewed	supporting the education and wellbeing of CLA.				
8.	Driscoll, J. (2013). Supporting the educational transitions of looked after children at Key Stage 4: The role of virtual schools and designated teachers. <i>Journal of Children's Services</i> , 8(2), 110-122.	Journal article Peer Reviewed	Explores the way that CLA nearing the end of compulsory education can be supported and encouraged to continue education/training.	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews with designated teachers (n=12) and virtual school heads (n=4).	2	Suggests that the VS/DTs can play an important part in encouraging and supporting looked after children to stay in education post-16
9.	Fletcher-Campbell, F., Archer, T., and Tomlinson, K. (2003). <i>The role of the school in supporting the education of children in public care</i> . Department for Education and Skills: London.	Official publication	Explores the role of the school in supporting education outcomes for CLA and identify best practice.	Qualitative	Interviews in 20 schools across 8 LAs with over 100 individuals (including VS, DTs, SENCOs, head teachers, CLA, carers)	3	Useful information about perceived role of DTs, however published before role became statutory.
10.	Goodall, D. (2014). <i>An Interpretative Phenomenological Study Exploring Designated Teachers' Experiences of Supporting Looked After Children</i> . Unpublished Thesis. University of Sheffield.	Unpublished thesis	To explore designated teachers' experiences of supporting CLA.	Qualitative	Semi-structured Interviews with designated teachers (n=6) across primary and secondary.	4	Useful information about the designated teacher role but uses a small sample from one local authority, impacting the transferability of findings. Suggests future research that looks at role more widely (rationale for current project).
11.	Harker, R., Dobelober, D., Sinclair, R., and Berridge, D. (2004). <i>Taking Care of Education: An Evaluation of the Education of Looked After Children</i> . London: National Children's Bureau.	Book	Evaluation of the <i>Taking Care of Education Programme</i> that aimed to explore whether improvements in corporate parenting can lead to better educational outcomes for CLA.	Mixed methods	Multiple sources of data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews with key LA staff from social services and education (n=106); five rounds of interviews held every six months. Initial interviews and questionnaires with CLA (n=80) and follow-up interviews after two-years (n=56). Interviews with CLA key adults (37 foster carers, 12 residential carers, 18 teachers, 4 social workers, 4 parents). 	4	Published before designated teacher role made statutory. Provided evidence for the benefit of a lead in LA to champion and coordinate CLA educational outcomes (i.e. virtual school head).
12.	Hayden, C. (2005). More than a piece of paper?: Personal education plans and 'looked after' children in England. <i>Child & Family Social Work</i> , 10(4), 343-352.	Journal article Peer reviewed	To investigate the quality of PEPs, via perceptions from key actors and assessment of the content and quality of the document.	Mixed methods	Three sources of data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey of designed teachers (n=148) Interviews with staff in social services (n=35), education (n=24 including 10 designated teachers). A case file audit of PEPs to investigate quality. 	3	Data gathered from only one LA so transferability limitations. Also, an older study so findings may not be as applicable to current context. However, provided useful insight into designated teacher concerns about the role that mirror current context (i.e. not having additional time or resources allocated to designated teacher duties).

13.	Hibbert, H. (2001). Promoting the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care. <i>Adoption and Fostering</i> , 25(2), 26-32.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Summary and analysis of the education of CLA with reference to DoH/DfEE (2000)	n/a	n/a	2	Summarises the guidance and identifies key implications for practice, including joint working between education and social care; calls for all schools to appoint a DT.
14.	Higgs, J. (2006). <i>Corporate parenting: the contribution of designated teachers</i> . EdD thesis The Open University.	Unpublished thesis	Explores the impact of the introduction of the designated teacher role, and their contribution to corporate parenting.	Mixed methods Case study	Multiple sources of data: • Semi-structured interviews with designated teachers (n=5). • Survey of social workers (n=15). • Interviews with CLA (n=7)	4	Data gathered from only one LA so transferability limitations. Provides insight into designated teacher role perceptions and re-interviewed participants two years later to explore changes over time.
15.	Jackson, S. (2015). The Virtual School for Children in Out-of-Home Care: A Strategic Approach to Improving Their Educational Attainment. <i>Children Australia</i> , 40(4), 327-334.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Provides an overview of current literature on the virtual school and presents a case study of preliminary findings from an ongoing study.	Case study	Telephone interviews with an undefined number of virtual school heads and a case study of one virtual school head.	3	Case study of a single virtual school head limits transferability but provides an in-depth exploration of their role. Unable to locate the 'study in progress'
16.	Kelly, P., Watt, L. and Giddens, S. (2020). An attachment aware schools programme: a safe space, a nurturing learning community. <i>Pastoral Care in Education</i> , 38(4), 335-354.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Action research evaluating a virtual school's Attachment Aware Schools Programme in over 77 schools.	Mixed methods	Pre (n=263) and post (n=154) questionnaires (self-report) measuring 'attachment awareness' in schools staff, followed by semi-structured interviews with 17 schools.	3	Data gathered from only one LA so transferability limitations. Provides an evaluation of an attachment aware initiative developed by the virtual school to promote outcomes for schools and children.
17.	National Association of Virtual School Heads (2019). <i>The Virtual School Handbook</i> . Birmingham: National Association of Virtual School Heads.	Report	An updated handbook for virtual school heads published by the National Association of Virtual School Heads.	n/a	n/a	2	The most up-to-date handbook that outlines the statutory framework and key roles and responsibilities for virtual schools.
18.	Norwich, B., Richards, A., and Nash, T. (2010). Educational Psychologists and Children in Care: Practices and Issues. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 26(4), 375-390.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Explores the EP role when working with CLA, including EP views on the DT role.	Mixed methods	Survey of EPs (n=107)	2	Explores the DT role from the perspective of EPs, including experiences of multiagency working. But, does not include DT views.
19.	Ofsted (2012). <i>The Impact of Virtual Schools on the Educational Progress of Looked-after Children</i> . London: Crown Copyright.	Official publication	Explores the impact of virtual schools in nine local authorities to illustrate positive work that have benefited children.	Mixed methods	Multiple sources of data: • Tracking education data. • Focus groups on CLA cases (n=54) with key professionals involved. • Interviews with social workers. • Interviews with designated teachers. • Interviews with CLA/care leavers	3	Unspecified number of DTs in sample, yet views were gathered from nine LAs so greater transferability. Concludes that the VS has led to improvements for CLA, but the evaluation lacks any hard data on attainment/outcomes.
20.	Parker, E. (2017). An actor-network theory reading of change for children in public care. <i>British Educational Research Journal</i> , 43(1), 151-167.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Explores: how change is enacted for LAC pupils in PEP meetings; who, and what, are the key actors for change in the PEP process; and is the PEP process fit for purpose?	Qualitative Multiple case study design	Observation of three PEP meetings (attended by the designated teacher, social worker, carer and CLA).	3	Very small scale – three case studies from one LA. Identifies the virtual school and designated teachers as key actors in the PEP process.

21.	Read, S., Macer, M., and Parfitt, A. (2020). Effective use of Pupil Premium Plus to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. Bath, UK: Bath Spa University.	Research Report	Explores the effective use of PP+ funded interventions.	Mixed methods	Online questionnaires (qualitative and quantitative; n=187) and interviews with virtual school staff (n=4) and one designated teacher to explore experiences and practice using PP+.	4	The accuracy of what participants stated was not the focus of the project, therefore represents the broad views of the sample which may limit transferability.
22.	Rees, A. and The National Virtual School Network. (2015). <i>The Virtual School Handbook</i> . Oxford: Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education.	Report	A handbook for virtual school heads published by the National Association of Virtual School Heads	n/a	n/a	2	Initial handbook that outlines the statutory framework and key roles and responsibilities for virtual schools.
23.	Rivers, S. (2018). Supporting the education of looked after children: the role of the virtual school head. <i>Adoption and Fostering</i> , 42(2), 151-161.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Provides a personal account of her experience as a virtual school head.	Qualitative Single case study design	Single case study that illustrates the author's personal experience as a virtual school head.	3	Discusses reasons for creating the virtual school; outlines an evolution of relevant legislation. Limitation: small sample (n=1) and one viewpoint.
24.	Sebba, J., and Berridge, D. (2019). The role of the Virtual School in supporting improved educational outcomes for children in care. <i>Oxford Review of Education</i> , 45(4), 538-555.	Journal article Peer reviewed	Explores the role of the virtual school in supporting educational outcomes for CLA.	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews with virtual school heads (n=16).	4	Current research following the VSH role becoming statutory. Author reflects on the lack of data linking intervention to outcomes and largely anecdotal evidence on the impact of the virtual school.
25.	Simpson (2012). <i>The Virtual School for Cared for Children: An Exploration of Its Current and Future Role in Raising Pupils' Academic Attainment and Achievement and Promoting Emotional Wellbeing</i> . Unpublished Thesis. The University of Manchester.	Unpublished thesis	Explores the current and future role of the virtual school in one LA.	Mixed methods	Multiple sources of data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of designated teachers (n=51) • Semi-structured interviews with members of the virtual school team (n=5). • An appreciative inquiry/focus group with education staff (n=5). 	4	In-depth exploration highlighting the strengths of the VS model but limited by small-scale study (one LA).
26.	Waterman, V. (2020). <i>"It depends on the individual": A psycho-social exploration of designated teachers' and virtual school advisory teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children in education</i> . Unpublished Thesis. Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and University of Essex.	Unpublished thesis	Explores the experiences of virtual school advisory teachers and designated teachers in supporting children in care.	Qualitative	Unstructured interviews with virtual school advisory teachers (n=4) and designated teachers (n=4) using a Free Associative Narrative Method.	4	Psychoanalytic exploration of virtual school and designated teacher experiences, however the small sample limits generalisability.
27.	Whitehouse, C. (2014). <i>An Exploration of Designated Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of Educational Psychologists in Supporting Looked After Children</i> . Unpublished Thesis. University of East London.	Unpublished thesis	Explores designated teacher perceptions on the role of EPs in supporting CLA.	Mixed methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of designated teachers (n=73). • Semi-structured interviews with designated teachers (n=9). 	3	Only one LA sampled. Complements Norwich et al. (2010) but providing DT perceptions on EP involvement, including multiagency working.

Appendix C: Questionnaires for Virtual Schools and Designated Teachers

Virtual school questionnaire

Section A: Virtual school information

1. What is your role in the virtual school?
2. How long have you been in that role?
3. Where in England is your virtual school located?
 - a. North East
 - b. North West
 - c. Yorkshire and the Humber
 - d. West Midlands
 - e. East Midlands
 - f. South West
 - g. South East
 - h. East of England
 - i. Greater London
4. How many staff are currently employed by the virtual school?
5. Structurally, where in the LA is the virtual school located? (within Social Care, Education, etc.)
6. Approximately how many looked after and previously looked after children are on roll at your virtual school?
 - a. 0-100
 - b. 100-500
 - c. 500-1000
 - d. 1000-2000
 - e. 2000+
7. Does the virtual school currently employ or commission work from the Educational Psychology Service?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other ____
8. If yes, what type of support or input does the EP Service provide?
9. Does the virtual school currently employ or commission work from other services? E.g. Speech and Language, health, specialist services, CAMHS
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other ____

Section B: Designated teacher information

10. Approximately how many designated teachers do you have in your county / borough?
 - a. 0-100
 - b. 100-500
 - c. 500-1000
 - d. 1000-2000
 - e. 2000+

11. Statutory guidance outlines the following duties for a designated teacher. Over the course of a term, how much time would you expect a designated teacher to dedicate to each part of their role? (1 = never; 2 = once a term; 3 = once a month; 4 = once a week; 5 = daily)
- a. Liaising with and advising teachers about how to support looked after and previously looked after children.
 - b. Liaising with parents, carers and guardians to promote good home-school links.
 - c. Working with the virtual school to promote educational outcomes.
 - d. Working directly with looked after and previously looked after children.
 - e. Developing or reviewing whole school policy and procedure to ensure that children are not inadvertently disadvantaged.
 - f. Developing and implementing Personal Education Plans.
 - g. Working with the Designated Safeguarding Lead around any safeguarding concerns relating to looked after and previously looked after children.
12. In your opinion, what are some of the **key challenges** that designated teachers face?
13. What **services, training or support** does the virtual school provide to designated teachers?
14. How satisfied are you with **the number of designated teachers that engage** with services, training or support offered by the virtual school?
- a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Moderately satisfied
 - d. Slightly satisfied
 - e. Not at all satisfied
15. What services, training or support would you *like* to offer designated teachers that you are not currently able to?
16. What are the current **obstacles** that prevent you from developing or implementing additional services, training or support for designated teachers?
17. Do you have any other comments about how the virtual school works with and supports designated teachers?

Designated teacher questionnaire

Section A: School information

1. Where in England is your school located?
 - a. North East
 - b. North West
 - c. Yorkshire and the Humber
 - d. West Midlands
 - e. East Midlands
 - f. South West
 - g. South East
 - h. East of England
 - i. Greater London
2. What stage of education do you work in?
 - a. Early Years
 - b. Primary
 - c. Secondary
 - d. Further Education
 - e. Other ____
3. What type of school do you work in?
 - a. Academy
 - b. Community school (LA-maintained)
 - c. Faith school
 - d. Foundation school
 - e. Free school
 - f. Grammar school
 - g. Private or independent school
 - h. Pupil referral unit
 - i. Sixth-form college
 - j. Special school
 - k. State boarding school
 - l. Voluntary school
 - m. Other ____
4. Approximately how many staff members are at your school?
 - a. Teaching staff:
 - b. Non-teaching support staff:
5. Approximately how many pupils are on roll?
 - a. Total pupils:
 - b. Looked after and previously looked after children:

Section B: Designated teacher details

6. Approximately how long have you been the designated teacher? (i.e. total years)
7. Are you:
 - a. A full-time member of teaching staff
 - b. A part-time member of teaching staff
 - c. A full-time member of non-teaching staff
 - d. A part-time member of non-teaching staff
8. Do you have a leadership role in the school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other ____

9. What additional roles or responsibilities do you have in the school?
- SENCO / Inclusion Manager
 - Deputy Head / Assistant Head / Headteacher
 - Designated Safeguarding Lead
 - Head of Year
 - Class or subject teacher
 - Other ____
10. When the designated teacher role was first described to you, how confident and prepared did you feel about taking up the role?
- Very confident and prepared
 - Confident and prepared
 - Moderately confident and prepared
 - Slightly confident and prepared
 - Not at all confident and prepared
11. Did you receive any initial training when you started the designated teacher role?
- Yes
 - No
 - Other ____

Section C: Roles and responsibilities

12. In a typical week, how much time is dedicated to your designated teacher role?
- Less than one day a week
 - 1-2 days per week
 - 2-3 days per week
 - 3-4 days per week
 - 4-5 days per week
13. Statutory guidance outlines the following duties for a designated teacher. Over the course of a term, how much time would you typically dedicate to each part of your role? (1 = never; 2 = once a term; 3 = once a month; 4 = once a week; 5 = daily)
- Liaising with and advising teachers about how to support looked after and previously looked after children.
 - Liaising with parents, carers and guardians to promote good home-school links.
 - Working with the virtual school to promote educational outcomes.
 - Working directly with looked after and previously looked after children.
 - Developing or reviewing whole school policy and procedure to ensure that children are not inadvertently disadvantaged.
 - Developing and implementing Personal Education Plans.
 - Working with the Designated Safeguarding Lead around any safeguarding concerns relating to looked after and previously looked after children.
14. How satisfied are you with the amount of **time, resources or support** you have to meet your Designated Teacher duties?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Moderately satisfied
 - Slightly satisfied
 - Not at all satisfied
15. How **effective** do you feel in your designated teacher role?
- Very effective
 - Effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Slightly effective
 - Not at all effective

16. How do you measure your effectiveness? (*i.e. how do you know you have met your duties or done a good job?*)
17. How well informed do you think **other staff members** are about what your DT role involves?
- Very aware of what the role involves
 - Aware
 - Moderately aware
 - Slightly aware
 - Not at all aware of what the role involves
18. What are some of the **key challenges** you face in your designated teacher role?
19. What additional **resources, support or training** would make your role easier?

Section D: Support and provision for looked after and previously looked after children

20. What provision or support does your school offer to looked after and previously looked after children? *Please list specific support or intervention below (e.g. learning support, social/emotional support, etc):*
21. How satisfied are you with the **provision or support** available to looked after and previously looked after children in your school?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Moderately satisfied
 - Slightly satisfied
 - Not at all satisfied
22. How would you improve the provision or support available to looked after and previously looked after children in your school?

Section E: Working with other professionals

23. How would you describe your experiences of working with the **virtual school**?
- Very positive
 - Positive
 - Neutral
 - Negative
 - Very negative
24. Please explain briefly **why** you feel this way.
25. How satisfied are you with the **training, networking or CPD opportunities** offered by the virtual school to designated teachers in your area?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Moderately satisfied
 - Slightly satisfied
 - Not at all satisfied
26. How satisfied are you with the **amount of time** you have to attend training, networking or CPD opportunities?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Moderately satisfied
 - Slightly satisfied
 - Not at all satisfied

27. How would you describe your experiences working with Social Care?
- Very positive
 - Positive
 - Neutral
 - Negative
 - Very negative
28. Please explain briefly **why** you feel this way.
29. Have you ever worked with an **Educational Psychologist** within your designated teacher role?
- Yes
 - No
 - Other ___
30. If yes, what type of **support or input** did the Educational Psychologist provide?
31. How **relevant** do you think support or input from an Educational Psychologist would be?
- Very relevant
 - Relevant
 - Moderately relevant
 - Slightly relevant
 - Not at all relevant

Section F: General demographics

32. What gender do you identify as?
- Male
 - Female
 - Other ____
 - Prefer not to answer
33. What is your age?
- 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-54
 - 55-64
 - 65 +
 - Prefer not to answer

Final statement:

Thank you for sharing your views and experiences. If you would like to be contacted about the outcomes of this research or be involved in future research, please enter your email address below. Your survey responses will remain anonymous and your email will not be linked to your answers.

Appendix D: Interview Schedule for Designated Teachers

Introduction:

- *Revisit information contained within the Participant Information Sheet.*
- *Give participants time to ask any questions and give verbal consent.*

The aim of this interview is to gain an in-depth understanding of your experience as a Designated Teacher – what this means in terms of your roles and responsibilities; your work with the Virtual School and other school staff; and your experiences around supporting CLA. I am interested in exploring your thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reflections. There are no right or wrong answers and I would like you to be as open and honest as possible. Everything you say will be kept confidential and anonymised during transcription so please do speak freely and take your time to think and talk.

Questions:

1. Background information

- What type of school setting do you work in? (i.e. stage of education and type of school)
- How many pupils are currently roll?
- How many CLA / previously looked after are currently on roll? Have SEN?
- How long have you been the Designated Teacher?
- What teaching qualifications do you currently hold?
- What are your additional roles / responsibilities in the school?

2. Can you tell me about how you came to be the designated teacher in your school?

- What was your previous role?
- How was the role explained to you?
- What did you expect the role to be like?

3. Can you tell me about your training or CPD since becoming the designated teacher?

- What type of training or support did you receive when you started the role?
- What type of ongoing CPD, training or networking is available to you in your area?
- How often are you able to access this type of support?

4. Can you tell me about some of your key roles and responsibilities as the DT?

- How does this compare to your previous expectations about the role?
- Has your role changed over time in any way?
- Are there any other duties you feel you should have?
- Are there any responsibilities you have that you feel you shouldn't?
- How do you think others view your role? (i.e. staff, parents/carers, children, professionals)

5. Can you tell me a bit about how effective you feel in your DT role?

- How do you measure your effectiveness?
- What helps you to be effective in your role?
- Where do you go when you need support or have questions about your DT role?
- What are some of the highlights associated with your role?
- What are some of the challenges associated with your role?
- What do you think could be done to help reduce the challenges or to improve the role?

6. Can you tell me about your experiences of working with other professionals? (i.e. virtual schools, social workers, EPs, teachers, wider professionals)

- What has worked well?
- What are potential challenges?
- What could be improved for the future?

7. Conclusion

- If you could make a recommendation to the Department for Education about the DT role, what would you say?
- What else would you like to mention that we haven't already spoken about in relation to your Designated Teacher role?

General prompts:

- *Why? How? Can you tell me more about that? Tell me what you were thinking? How did you feel? What do you mean by...? Can you give me an example of...?*

Debrief:

- Thank for taking the time to talk about experiences.
- Highlight information in the Participant Information Sheet about what will happen to the results and who to contact for further information.
- Emphasise to get in touch if they want to discuss anything further.
- Ensure there is someone in school they can talk to if they need to.
- Time to process and reflect on the interview. How did they find it? Do they have any additional questions?
- Ask about whether they would like to receive information about the findings.

Appendix E: Example Interview Transcript and Coding Categories

Table 12

Example Interview Transcript

Line	Transcript	Coding / Comments	Theme / subtheme
1	LB: What are your additional roles or responsibilities in the school?		
2	DT3: So, for the first nine years in my previous school, I was a teaching		
3	head teacher, so I was the Head Teacher, teacher, SENCO, designated		
4	teacher, and then in my current role, I've been the SENCO and the head		
5	teacher and the designated teacher at the same time. I mean, and		
6	obviously with the head teacher role it comes with the designated		
7	safeguarding lead as well. It's a small school, so you wear a lot of hats!		
8	LB: Can you tell me how you came to be the designated teacher in		
9	your school, even if - maybe going back to the very first time you		
10	took up the role and then your current role.		
11	DT3: Probably because it was related to special needs. So all special		
12	needs and additional needs were kind of lumped together and being the		
13	designated teacher you obviously have an additional duty and the		
14	children obviously have an additional need. So I think it kind of came		
15	about that way.		
16	LB: And can you tell me, or do you remember how the role was		
17	explained to you?		
18	DT3: It wasn't explained to me at all. So it wasn't described to me.		
19	Basically, I took up the SEN role. We had a little child who I now realise		
20	had attachment difficulties, but they were seen as behaviour problems at		
21	the time. So I took that on as the SEN role, and his mum actually		
22	emailed me the paperwork from the government - because it wasn't the		
23	most well advertised thing about the designated teacher. She emailed		
24	me the paperwork about it, so I read it and realised, 'Oh, yes. Okay. So		
25	that's what I do'. So it just morphed into my role. And that's where I		
26	started researching and looking into supporting children and, you know,		
27	helping kids who've got attachment and trauma in their lives.		
28	LB: Did you say the Mum? The mum of this child?		

<p>29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67</p>	<p>DT3: Yes, the mum of the child. So she was very, very active in terms of advocating for looked after and adopted children. So she'd obviously adopted her son and was finding life difficult for him.</p> <p>LB: And do you remember, was this when the role was still newly coming about? Would you remember when this was?</p> <p>DT3: I'd never heard of it. So it was in my second or third year at my old school? I reckon it was about 10 years ago? So I don't know if that was new, because I'd never heard of it before, so I don't know how long it had been hanging out there as a role.</p> <p>LB: When you were reading about the role and learning about it, what did you expect it to be like, before you took it out more formally?</p> <p>DT3: I kind of thought that it would be more of an administrative kind of thing, where, you know, it was more about keeping track of the children, because at that point, I didn't have a very good understanding of attachment and trauma and the impact that has on children and how they behave, and how they're communicating their needs. So I still very much thought of it as challenging behaviours as a separate kind of path to being designated teacher. I thought the teacher - because it says, you know, we have to liaise with parents and all that kind of stuff I thought, 'Well, okay, I'm kind of doing that anyway'. But that's more admin-y and less teacher-y.</p> <p>LB: When you took up the role, how did this compare to your expectations of it? What were your sort of roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>DT3: I have to think about that. I would say it does still have a lot of admin that goes with it. There's certainly a lot of paperwork, there's lots of reviews, there's PEPs and all that kind of stuff that we do now. So it is still paperwork-y. But I think as my understanding around attachment has developed, and as I've undergone training and all that sort of thing. I think I've realised that it's more about the individual children and there's the requirement to be flexible, basically, for the children that I don't think is a quite apparent in - looking at the paperwork. So I think it's definitely more person based than paper based.</p> <p>LB: Can you tell me a bit more about that what you mean about that?</p> <p>DT3: Well, when I read the paperwork, it was all about how the designated teachers role and job is to, you know, liaise with the parents of the looked after or adopted child. Your job is to ensure that that child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships and working with parents/carers • Understanding the individual needs of CLA • Awareness about the role • Understanding about the role <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding about the role: first impressions were that it was an administrative role • Learning on the job (attachment, trauma and CLA needs) • Reference to statutory guidance • Key liaison with parents/carers • Crossover of roles/responsibilities • Falling into the role <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding about the role • Key responsibilities include admin and PEPS • Understanding of role developing over time as knowledge, skill and experience grow • Understanding the individual needs of CLA • Relationships central to the role <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to statutory guidance • Key liaison with parents/carers • Key responsibilities include advocating for care-experienced children in accessing curriculum 	<p>Building relationships and making contacts: developing relationships with parents/carers and children.</p> <p>Role awareness and 'raising the profile'.</p> <p>Complexities of the designated teacher role: role clarity and expectations in an 'all-encompassing role'.</p> <p>Complexities of the designated teacher role: role clarity and expectations in an 'all-encompassing role'.</p> <p>Complexities of the designated teacher role: role development and 'learning on the job'.</p> <p>Building relationships and making contacts: developing relationships with parents/carers and children.</p> <p>Complexities of the designated teacher role: role clarity and expectations in an 'all-encompassing role'.</p>
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<p>68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106</p>	<p>has the same amount of access to the curriculum and supporting them in the development and that sort of thing which, if the child's not in your class, the teachers doing that anyway. Your job is to basically do the checking up in the admin part of it. You know, all this stuff that's not related to the child. But then, having now got to the point where we've got 3.3% of our school population is looked after or adopted, in comparison to the national amount, which is I think about 1.85% or something like that? I've started to realise that it's more about the relationships that you have with a child and the relationships you have with the parents because every child is different. I mean, every child is different anyway, but every child who's got an attachment difficulty, even though there's the four main types, they're still very different in how they respond to different triggers and things like that. So actually, it's the relationships I've built with those children, regardless of the fact that I'm not their teacher, and the relationship I have with their parents that have actually made the difference, I think as the designated teacher, rather than the admin paperwork, monitoring of pupil premium grants, and all that kind of stuff.</p> <p>LB: Can you outline what your key roles and responsibilities are, day to day?</p> <p>DT3: So basically, what we recognised with our children is the need they have for flexibility when it comes to virtually everything. They have a need for control, they have a need - they've got massive anxiety, they've got very low self-esteem, very low resilience levels. And so my role has been to set up and to create an environment across the school where those children feel safe, and are able to come to school without that stress - the additional stress that comes with being you know, having attachment difficulties or trauma in their life. So I have created and started a sensory circuit that we run every morning that obviously helps with the regulations. We've got training that I've organised for the staff - we do regular training and updates. So every year, we do different attachment level, we look at creating positive relationships, we are doing therapeutic strategies, we do transition management. So we do a lot of training and support for the staff across the board. It's been about making sure that those children - I mean, some stroll into school quite happily, some don't. So it's about having people in the right places to either entice the children in or to give them the time that they need to kind of circle a bit before they come in. It's about having someone there so that they can come in earlier before the others if they need to. It's</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key responsibilities include tracking and monitoring data. • High proportion of care-experienced children in the school • Relationships central to the role • Relationship with parent/carers and children • Understanding the individual needs of CLA • Understanding about attachment, trauma, child development • Relationships central to the role • Relationship with parent/carers and children • Measuring impact through relationships over data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the individual needs of CLA • Understanding about the impact of attachment/trauma on behaviour • Designated teachers as advocates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of initiatives to support SEMH needs of CLA at school and how to be flexibility to their individual needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sensory circuits ○ Training for staff (attachment, relationships; therapeutic strategies; transition) ○ Flexibility with morning drop-off ○ Monthly coffee mornings ○ Exploring triggers for children ○ Support groups for parents ○ Support and training for families 	<p>Building relationships and making contacts: developing relationships with parents/carers and children.</p> <p>Role clarity and expectations in an 'all-encompassing role'. Building relationships and making contacts: Developing relationships with parents/carers and children.</p> <p>Complexities of the designated teacher role: Measuring impact and 'making a difference'.</p> <p>Complexities of the designated teacher role: role clarity and expectations in an 'all-encompassing role'.</p>
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<p>107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135</p>	<p>about having that support for the parents, so run a coffee morning - well, I did in healthier time, but haven't been able to do it this term, - but we run coffee mornings once a month for the parents, we discuss our timetabling, we look at what's coming up, we look at potential triggers for each of the children, we do a support group for those parents so they can just have a chance to breathe out and rant if they need to. We provide support and training for other families as well - we engage with social services and that sort of thing. I suppose now that I've got my staff up and running in terms of providing the support to the children directly I've become more administrative again.</p> <p>LB: That's interesting. So how then - because my next question was about how do you think the role has changed over time?</p> <p>DT3: It kind of morphed, so for me now it's about facilitating other people to do it properly. And it's taken me the five years I've been in this school. We've last year got our adoption friendly school. We kind of worked through Dr Langton - Emma Gore Langton and Katherine Boy, they've got a book out about becoming - and they've got like a process and we've worked through all of that we've attained all of that. So it's a very important thing for me personally, and I think as a head that kind of filters through the school. But because I've had five years of training up my staff, getting the people I need in the right place, making sure I've got the right people doing the right things, I'm now able to step back and let them continue. And I just need to prod them occasionally and make sure I keep everything updated, really. Whereas before I'd had to step in and do that and create the relationships and be the key adults for those children. But now, the other adults can be - we can let the children choose - we can see who they naturally gravitate towards and then they've got someone who knows what they're doing who can be their key attachment person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with staff and staff as advocates for CLA • Systems developed in school to support CLA and designated teacher; delegation of duties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role development over time • Facilitating others in school and delegation of duties/responsibilities • Knowledge and understanding of attachment, trauma and CLA • Personal passion and drive • Leadership role and filtering change through the school • Authority and influence in school • Working through staff • Change takes time (e.g. implementing attachment/trauma-informed approaches) • Relationships central to the role 	<p>Building relationships and making contacts: working with and through school staff.</p> <p>Role development and 'learning on the job'.</p> <p>Building relationships and making contacts: working with and through school staff.</p> <p>Measuring impact and 'making a difference'</p> <p>Working with and through school staff.</p> <p>Building relationships and making contacts.</p>
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Table 13

Coding Categories for Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Complexities of the designated teacher role		
Subtheme	Description and codes	Sample of Quotes
1.1. Managing workloads and wearing 'lots of hats'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple roles and responsibilities • Crossover of roles and responsibilities • Crossover between DT and SENCO role • Crossover between DT and DSL role • Time and workload pressures • Lack of acknowledgement about time needed • Desire for more time • Role crossover enabling a holistic view of children • Fluctuations in workload • Need time to enact duties effectively • Different school settings impact workload and role 	<p>'I've got quite a lot of roles within the school' (DT4).</p> <p>'I wear lots of hats' (DT14).</p> <p>'My SENCO role is very much about supporting children who are disadvantaged. So in some ways, it rolls along quite nicely with that SENCO role because it's similar, I suppose' (DT9).</p> <p>'Everybody feels it is part of the SENCO role, but it isn't really. But often they kind of tag along together don't they. It was just part of those SENCO responsibilities, and that came under that umbrella' (DT2).</p> <p>'When I was given the safeguarding and the child protection side of things, because I was then working with students who went on to become looked after, it just naturally... I had already begun working with the student and the family and so obviously knew their story really well' (DT13).</p> <p>'It works out quite well because at least I know everything. At least I know all the safeguarding, I know all of the SEN stuff, I know all of the looked after stuff - it's a one stop shop' (DT15).</p> <p>'We've got some very challenging looked after children in our school, and therefore the role is more time consuming. It requires more of me - they require more intervention' (DT7).</p> <p>'Ten PEPs doesn't sound like an awful lot, but when it's one person doing it, and all of the reviews as well, and they're happening throughout a term, it does dominate a lot of your term' (DT4).</p> <p>'You need the resources. Now that is, that's essentially the time, really to do the job properly' (DT1).</p> <p>'You don't really get enough time to do things. I think there really should be more time afforded to designated teachers ... the role, if it's done properly requires time and attention' (DT6).</p> <p>'The capacity you need in your workforce to manage a looked after child is huge. And unfortunately, it's not something that schools have recognised - not something the government have recognised' (DT10).</p> <p>'It's not a role you can just accept to do lightly ... you've got the lives of some very young, vulnerable children who've had horrific starts in life in the palm of your hands ... if you're not in a position to give them the time to fight for what they need, then it's not the role for you' (DT4).</p> <p>'I'd done it in a previous school, which was a lovely little leafy Primary school in the middle of nowhere, and it was very different here because it's very complicated because it's a PRU ... it was just far higher calibre simply because there was a lot of additional needs' (DT2).</p>

<p>1.2. Role development and 'learning on the job'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inheriting or acquiring the role • Routes into the DT role • Actively choosing the role • Unexpected add-on to ongoing duties • Training opportunities • Learning on the job • Falling into the role • Developing an understanding of the role over time • Networking opportunities 	<p>'It just morphed into my role' (DT3). 'There was a vacancy for this job as an assistant head teacher. So, it was an internal promotion, and part of it was to be the designated teacher' (DT7).</p> <p>'I sort of just inherited it when I took on the SENCO role' (DT9) 'I took over as pastoral based deputy, and with that came anything to do with safeguarding, anything to do with vulnerable children, with deprivation' (DT10).</p> <p>'It was through choice really ... when I took over as head, three and a half years ago, the previous head did it and it was something I wanted to do' (DT5). 'I expressed an interest in doing this in September ... I said that I would like to take ownership of that group and take on that role to ensure that we weren't missing anything' (DT8).</p> <p>'Our virtual school is quite good at rolling out training for designated teachers. And they send out a bulletin which contains the training ... I did a general course on how to be a designated teacher - that was just a day's course' (DT10). 'All the authorities that I work with have offered online training ... but they've come quite late in the day for me, because I needed to know this in September' (DT4).</p> <p>'I went to optional, new designated teacher training run by the virtual school ... but it didn't actually provide me with any practical advice and guidance as to how to do it. I don't know whether I was meant to ask for that myself, but it didn't happen' (DT7). 'I kind of did training on the job, so I didn't actually access that much external training. I had a couple of contacts I knew within the system, and they came out and showed me how to do things as and when I needed to do them ... you just learn from other people in schools that were already doing it' (DT1).</p> <p>'I'm learning on the job as each child comes through' (DT3). 'It was a bit piecemeal, I guess. Nobody really explains to you exactly what you've got to do, or how to do it. I've kind of learned from what the person before me knew' (DT7).</p> <p>'It's all been sort of process of elimination, really - working things out, making sure I've got the right training, making sure I'm doing the right thing' (DT12). 'I learned on the job. There's no other way to do it, I'm afraid. I didn't have much of a handover with the SENCO that I took over from. We did have a handover period, but it was not... it was not comprehensive ... you just learn by your mistakes' (DT14).</p> <p>'We do have termly designated teachers meetings and before those, they often have a little half an hour session so if you're new to the role, you can go in and check in and just ask any questions, which is really, really helpful' (DT2).</p>
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<p>1.3. Role awareness and 'raising the profile'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Lack of) awareness about the role • Lack of awareness in schools about the role • Care-experienced children lack awareness about role • Lack of status or recognition in schools • Lack of authority • Misconceptions about the significance or purpose of role • Desire for greater authority, influence and recognition • Desire for greater autonomy • Desire for raising the profile of the role • Lack of status of influence outside of schools • Desire for greater involvement in care decision-making 	<p>'I don't think many people even know they exist to be honest' (DT3).</p> <p>'I don't think that the word "designated teacher" means much to many people' (DT7).</p> <p>'I don't think most people would even know there was one in schools' (DT10).</p> <p>'I don't think a lot of teachers know anything about the role. To be honest, nor did I when I started. It wasn't a role I'd heard of before' (DT9).</p> <p>'...one of the things that surprised me most about this role is I'm actually really surprised how unaware most people are about what it actually is, and even what the acronym [CLA] stands for' (DT6).</p> <p>'...it's a very good point. I don't think I've ever stood up in front of the staff and said, "I am the designated teacher, and this is what I do" because... and that might be a thing to do' (DT12).</p> <p>'I don't think anybody would be aware of what's done. ... there's not a great understanding of what is put in place for those children. And so therefore, what that role includes' (DT13).</p> <p>'...it just doesn't have that kind of high-level profile' (DT3).</p> <p>'I don't know whether it's promoted as it should be' (DT5).</p> <p>'I don't think it gets given the respect it deserves as a role - not from other teachers, I more mean in terms of being allocated a bit more time to do things. ... I just think that the role needs to be taken a bit more seriously' (DT6).</p> <p>'I don't think it's a role that has a huge amount of status within education ... in the pecking order of head teachers and assistant head teachers and DSLs and SENCOs, and things like that, I don't think it has a huge amount of weight or meaning for a lot of people' (DT7).</p> <p>'...in school, it's not seen as an important role' (DT15).</p> <p>'I think that it's really important that whoever the designated teacher is, has to have some sort of authority within the school, because otherwise no changes will be made ... it would have to be someone who's passionate about it, who's got the authority to do it, and to let it filter through the school' (DT3).</p> <p>'I think in some cases, they need to actually make more use of the designated teacher as someone who knows quite a lot about the student, both in terms of how the student's doing now, but also in terms of the student's aspirations and where they want to go. I do feel sometimes that, particularly decisions around care placement, with some local authorities certainly, they seem to be very quick to move students around...' (DT1).</p> <p>'It's sometimes not being able to influence any of those conversations ... I don't feel that I'm ever really listened to by social care - that side of things ... I have been invited to some of their CLA meetings in the past but I think often the education bit is skimmed over...' (DT2).</p>
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<p>1.4. Role clarity and expectations in an 'all-encompassing role'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations versus reality • All-encompassing role • Wide-ranging remit • Varying expectations about the role • Core responsibilities: PEPs, paperwork, tracking data • Core responsibilities: funding arrangements • Core responsibilities: key liaison between home-school • Core responsibilities: advocate for CLA • Working with previously looked after children 	<p>'I always imagined it to be quite an all-encompassing role' (DT7).</p> <p>'I think there is a plethora of different roles I feel like I have at different times' (DT2).</p> <p>'I thought it would probably be a lot of paperwork. Anything that involves social care usually is lots of paperwork' (DT1).</p> <p>'I think I've realised that it's more about the individual children and there's the requirement to be flexible, basically, for the children that I don't think is a quite apparent, looking at the paperwork. I think it's definitely more person-based than paper-based' (DT3).</p> <p>'I expected the role to be slightly less bureaucratic and more like mentoring these kids ... a significant chunk of the job is essentially me just being a middleman and liaising between different agencies ... that wasn't really advertised in the role' (DT6).</p> <p>'I didn't understand fully what the PEP process entailed. I thought it would be just like leading a meeting for any child - gathering feedback and setting targets and that sort of stuff. I did not understand the rigour with which the role and the process entailed ... it's certainly more challenging and more time consuming than I ever thought it would be' (DT7).</p> <p>'Part of being that designated teacher is actually knowing that there's money out there and actually, we need to bring it into our setting to support our students' (DT8).</p> <p>'The key thing is communication. Whether that is with carers, sometimes with parents, whether that is with staff members, senior leadership and also the students themselves. Being really clear and communicating what's happening when (DT2).</p> <p>'I'd like to be more hands on. But it's that recognition that actually, even if I can't be on the ground with them all the time, I can still be an advocate and push for those things which are needed, which cascaded from the people who are working directly with them' (DT2).</p> <p>'My first role and responsibility is the fact that I'm an advocate for these children in school. And often, even if I don't agree with something that comes from the virtual school, I've got to do what's best in the interest of that child - not just jump through a hoop or go through procedure' (DT4).</p> <p>'We've also been made responsible for monitoring and tracking those students that were previously looked after, which was an interesting thing, because it's an additional duty and expectation, that was kind of sneaked in without there being very much notice or fanfare about it, and not really with very much clarity about what, specifically is it that they're asking us to do with these formerly looked after students' (DT1).</p> <p>'I think it's really good that post-looked after children are now part of the deal. But as I said, nobody sort of said, here's an extra day a week to manage those children' (DT10).</p> <p>'Just because a student goes from being looked after to getting an SGO and being formally looked after, doesn't mean that stuff disappears overnight' (DT6).</p>
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<p>1.5. Measuring impact and 'making a difference'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DT sense of effectiveness • Measuring impact through academic outcomes • Measuring impact through wellbeing outcomes • Measuring impact through positive progress • Measuring impact through feedback • Desire to make a difference • Hopeful about making a difference • Variability in sense of effectiveness or impact • Recognition about being only part of the picture • Reliance on others to enact role effectively 	<p>'The best indicator that I'm effective in my role, is that my children make progress' (DT14). 'At the end of the day, if the children are happy at school and if they're engaging in education, and they achieve grades which allow them to get on to their next stage of education, then for me, I've achieved my role as a designated teacher' (DT12).</p> <p>'For me, success would be making sure their voices are really heard' (DT2). 'Do I have good relationships with carers? Do I have a good rapport and a good relationship with social services? Am I able to get things done quickly? Do the students feel like they're supported by me? ... That tends to be how I how I view myself as whether I've done a good job or not' (DT6).</p> <p>'You know you've done a good job when you give them that sense of belonging ... I ask the students, "Are you proud of yourself?" and sometimes they say, yes. So yeah, that makes me feel like I've done a good job' (DT7). 'I think the relationships indicate your efficacy and the relationships with the children and also to a degree the relationships with the parents' (DT3).</p> <p>'How do I know if I'm doing my job? Well, I think that would come into two ways. It's the feedback I get from staff and from carers about the difference things are making' (DT4). 'We've had really positive feedback from IROs, from social workers from the virtual school. So, I'm taking that as a positive' (DT8).</p> <p>'Just getting nice feedback from students saying, "thank you so much. We couldn't have gone through school without you"' (DT12). 'The PEP paper work is quality assured by virtual schools ... I think it's an external affirmation that you're doing you your job properly' (DT16).</p> <p>'It just is so lovely seeing them succeed, against all odds really. Being able to guide these kids in the right direction when they've had so much thrown at them from life' (DT6). 'When you see them doing well, or you see that something that you've done with them or for them, that it's made a difference and it's changed them in some way - it's just incredibly rewarding' (DT13).</p> <p>'The biggest highlight is when you actually see that you've helped to make a difference' (DT1). 'We do try. It doesn't always work out. But I think there are so many different complexities ... it's hard not knowing whether you've made a difference and perhaps feeling that you just haven't' (DT2).</p> <p>'I have my moments where I feel like I'm amazing at what I do. And then I have my moments when I think to myself what on earth possessed you to think you could do this?' (DT3). 'You can't always judge your impact in isolation, because there's so many factors that lead into what happens for them, for these young people' (DT7).</p> <p>'I'm only part of the picture and the teachers are only part of the picture. I think I'm doing what I need to do correctly ... The problem being I suppose, is the rest of the picture' (DT4).</p>
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Theme 2: Building relationships and making contacts		
Subtheme	Description and codes	Sample of Quotes
2.1. Working with and through school staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in partnership with school staff Building relationships with school staff Staff acting as advocates/champions for CLA Increasing staff awareness about the needs of CLA Increasing staff awareness about attachment/trauma Variation in staff understanding about needs of CLA Delegating or distributing responsibilities with staff Having support from senior leaderships 	<p>'If you really want to make a difference you've got to have the staff on board with you - so it's that open relationship with staff' (DT4).</p> <p>'Sometimes I rely on somebody else to have that connection with them and I filter that information through. Other times I'm able to be that person who's able to connect with them ... you need the support of your colleagues, because you can't do it all yourself. You really need people to also be those advocates – you can't just be the only one who's the advocate for that child' (DT2).</p> <p>'I think you need to have good relationships with your staff. And an understanding that yes, things can be very difficult at times. We work very much as teams' (DT11).</p> <p>'The attitude of teachers makes a massive difference ... all our teachers are good teachers, but some have a greater understanding of the needs of a child who is looked after' (DT10).</p> <p>'It's all well and good you having all these good intentions and supporting these kids really well, but you need to make sure that your colleagues know who they are and are able to do it as well' (DT6).</p> <p>'Working with other teachers, I generally find the vast majority quite positive, and they want to make adaptations and get things right in the classroom and be as supportive as they can' (DT13).</p> <p>'We've got staff in the building who understand the bit of the iceberg underneath, so all you have to do is remind them about it. But they need reminding because we all need reminding sometimes, I think - even if we're people who work very closely with those children' (DT7).</p> <p>'You've got to understand where these kids came from ... you have to understand attachment, you have to understand trauma, you have to understand sense of self' (DT15).</p> <p>'Some teachers are brilliant at getting me paperwork when I need it, others are not so good ... it really does depend on the teacher in terms of how well they engage with it' (DT9).</p> <p>'I wish they would make attachment awareness and emotion coaching statutory with teacher training ... because this isn't just for children that are looked after - it's good for all children' (DT11).</p> <p>'I think we've got better here in the school, sharing out the responsibilities. So that's given me more capacity to look at other areas and all that I've got to do' (DT5).</p> <p>'I've taken on the role. However, our Deputy Head, who is our designated safeguarding lead, she tends to help with the role ... we share the role' (DT9).</p> <p>'Having an SLT or head teacher who is empathetic and recognises when you say, 'Come on, I need a little bit of time on this', that they can give you a little bit of space to do that' (DT2).</p>

<p>2.2. Fostering a reciprocal relationship with virtual schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of a strong and trusting relationship • Developing a reciprocal relationship • Value contact, communication and support • Challenges when working with virtual schools • Developing relationship takes time and effort • Seeking support from the virtual school 	<p>'Over time, I've developed a good working relationship with the virtual school and there's been plenty of contact ... we have quite a good reciprocal relationship' (DT2).</p> <p>'What I've learned now, which I didn't probably know at the beginning, is that the virtual school are there to be our advocate, and our champion, and to support us ... I kind of felt at the beginning that you were almost beholden to them and you were just providing stuff ... actually, I can ask for your help, I can ask for your support, I can ask for you to do those things me' (DT8).</p> <p>'We have a good relationship with the virtual schools. They're pretty quick at coming back to us. They're also quite good at, if you can't get hold of a social worker, if you email the virtual school, they will sometimes just find out why it is but also find another social worker to help so that whatever you're trying to do isn't stopped because of the capacity as the social worker' (DT10).</p> <p>'I like being able to phone virtual schools and say, "I have this issue can you help?". I have a couple of virtual schools who are just amazing - and they will drop everything and meet with me, they will meet with the child, they will suggest resources, they're very, very good' (DT14).</p> <p>'It is almost trying to get that information from the virtual school, asking for their support and being able to seek that support and not be afraid to ask for it ... so I think it's knowing that that support is there and knowing that it's okay to ask for it' (DT8).</p> <p>'We trust each other's way of working, we have respect for each other's way of working and so it all just works a lot more smoothly - we have confidence in each other' (DT1).</p> <p>'I have a link now - because I've done it for quite a long time, I've got a link to various people. ... having meetings with them and then thinking, I feel like they would support me and just reaching out really. Just keep asking questions. But it's very much driven by you' (DT12).</p> <p>'Those virtual school teachers that have a good relationship with, I will ask them about issues for any of my children. It doesn't matter if they're not from that local authority, because the questions are generic, they're not necessarily specific to a geographical location' (DT14).</p> <p>'In some authorities, they are very quiet and you don't get much back. And you have to pick your own way through' (DT4).</p> <p>'I sometimes contact the assistant head [for the virtual school] but she is sporadic in getting back to me ... she always introduces herself to me like I don't remember who she is, but she's the only one I've got in terms of the virtual school' (DT7).</p> <p>'They [the virtual school] rarely come to the meetings. I have very little to do with them' (DT12).</p> <p>'I find the whole virtual school thing quite... I'm not quite sure what their role is, because I think actually, when it comes down to it, everything lands on school's lap. ... I don't think it works collaboratively ... it feels very much like virtual schools are there to hold us to account, rather than work collaboratively' (DT15).</p>
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<p>2.3. Developing relationships with parents/carers and children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with parents/carers • Providing support for parents/carers • Learning more about CLA through parents/carers • Relationships central to the role • Positive relationships linked to positive CLA outcomes • Building relationship with CLA central to the role • Developing a sense of trust with CLA • Emotional impact of building relationships • Emotionally demanding role 	<p>'It really, really helps to have that good relationship with the carers. Being able to empathise with them, because it's a really, really challenging role and job for them, but also recognising what support they might need' (DT2).</p> <p>'I think that probably my role is most important to the foster carers themselves, to be honest with you' (DT4).</p> <p>'Usually I've got a really good relationship with the carers of the students that I work with. I speak to them almost daily sometimes, and it goes both ways - they get in touch with me if they've got a concern or a problem, and likewise, I can get in touch with them easily, and they are happy to help and try and support them their end' (DT13).</p> <p>'Some parents and carers are easier to develop that relationship with than others, but you still need to maintain a professional relationship with them' (DT16).</p> <p>'It's the relationships I've built with those children and the relationship I have with their parents that have actually made the difference I think as the designated teacher, rather than the admin paperwork, monitoring of pupil premium grants, and all that kind of stuff' (DT3).</p> <p>'...and wherever the child is, mentally, emotionally, socially, they know you expect the best of them, you want the best for them, you'll provide the support they need to do the best they can. Just knowing that you've got their back really. I think that's massive to a child' (DT10).</p> <p>'You have to develop relationships with the children ... in order to be truly effective, the kids have to trust you - they have to trust that you have their best interests at heart, and that you know them well enough to be able to ensure that their provision is correct for them' (DT14).</p> <p>'...the emotional impact with the children - that's the hardest part of the job. I think if you're doing the job, right, and you've got the relationship, it's a two-way street so it does impact on you. You can't pretend it. You have to open yourself to the little kids and the kids open themselves to you, and that's the hardest bit, but it's also the best bit' (DT3).</p> <p>'Sometimes it can be harrowing, particularly when you read some of the case history of the children, and you tend to take that home with you' (DT4).</p> <p>'I didn't think it'd be as intense as the journey has been ... when you've got to hear the backgrounds of everything that has gone on to these children in their short lives, that's quite harrowing' (DT5).</p> <p>'There should be a service to help teachers talk through that stuff ... But that's part of the territory, unfortunately. That's one of the things that you're there for, so I understand that, by you being there and sitting and listening. you're hopefully helping that child a) heal from whatever it was that went on, but also stopping it from happening again. I think that's kind of the of things that gets you through' (DT6).</p>
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<p>2.4. Establishing links with education, health and care professionals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an understanding of wider agencies • Working in partnership with wider agencies • Gaining a holistic understanding of CLA needs • Promoting collaborative, joined-up working • Relationship building with mental health services • Relationship building with social care services • Relationship building with EP services 	<p>'If they've got a CAMHS worker or therapists working alongside them - I always try and touch base with them and form a relationship with them, because then you get a full picture of the child' (DT12).</p> <p>'But the relationship that I've got with the educational psychology staff that we be bought into, I knew them. I could say, this is what I want. This is what I'm concerned about. This is what I want you to investigate. And I feel there's more of a mutual trust there' (DT11).</p> <p>'We've largely worked with organisations like the virtual school, to an extent with social care, particularly with the NHS and mental health, and what we what we have done that's worked for all of us is we fund those services, and we second staff, to work for us' (DT1).</p> <p>'I tend to have not dealt with the EPs. Usually they go through our SENCO. I haven't done a huge amount of work with them' (DT2).</p> <p>'Educational psychologists - limited. I can't really comment, I don't really have any relationship with any of them to be fair' (DT12).</p> <p>'We are now a traded service and therefore you have to buy into it... it's a bit of a sore point with me - I think it should be every child's right to access an educational psychologist, whether the school can afford it or not' (DT11).</p> <p>'In terms of educational psychologists, we buy in privately ... We work really, really well with her, and we can talk to her about children and she is very proactive in giving us the correct advice. So that's fantastic' (DT4).</p> <p>'I desperately try to build up relationships with them [social care], so that it's not a "them and us". It's not a competition ... I try and make it so that we work harmoniously. And at the end of the day, the child should be in the middle. It's who's best equipped to do this, and then doing it effectively' (DT11).</p> <p>'They are so swamped, but that said, [the post-adoption Social Worker], when I speak to her, she will always give me an answer or point me in the direction of somewhere I can go ... So when I've got family worker support going on, there are two or three that I'll cheekily ask for, for my families, because I know they're just wonderful people who will do their best' (DT3).</p> <p>'When they have got a social worker in place, they always attend the PEPs. They always come to us if the child's reported any concerns around education, and we do try and work together. But it's a case of, that being a consistent person. It just hasn't happened recently' (DT13).</p>
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Theme 3: Negotiating challenges in the wider system		
Subtheme	Description	Sample of Quotes
3.1. A lack of standardisation between counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with multiple local authorities Variation between local authorities Different process, procedure and paperwork Differences in PEP process and procedure Adapting to using different systems Differing deadlines and timescales Different funding procedures Lack of standardisation around role expectations Differing roles during PEPs Lack of clarity around role boundaries 	<p>'The difficulty is we're dealing with quite a lot of authorities here' (DT4).</p> <p>'I have children from other local authorities who we work really, really well with. Unfortunately, my own one isn't in my opinion up to standard. But others are brilliant' (DT5).</p> <p>'They all do everything different, so it's really complicated - from how they do funding, how you apply for stuff, how they run the PEPs ... I don't know if they assume they're all the same and they're not, but you almost have to go and seek that information out' (DT8).</p> <p>'Different counties have different e-PEP systems, which is very confusing' (DT8).</p> <p>'I have 30 children and I work with 15 local authorities. Every single local authority has a different PEP process ... there is no standardisation nationwide of the PEP process; therefore, there is no standardisation of the expectation on the designated teacher' (DT14).</p> <p>'All three [local authorities] do different systems. There's no joined-up thinking' (DT3).</p> <p>'... particularly when it's across different local authorities, so they might have slightly different timescales and key dates to keep to' (DT1).</p> <p>'It would be very helpful if every authority had the same PEP format and they don't, they've all got different ones' (DT4).</p> <p>'...because we draw down the money slightly differently for every virtual school ... they all get the same amount of money, but they all choose to spend it and give it out in different ways' (DT8).</p> <p>'It's not standardised. Every social worker goes to a PEP meeting quite differently to the next. Some tend to lead the PEPs, some tend to take a backseat and say you lead the PEP. You've got to take a feel of that situation, as you get to know the social worker, really. It's not one-size-fits-all' (DT4).</p> <p>'Anytime you're dealing with different people, you're dealing with different expectations. And the big difficulty is there's a real variance in what they [social workers] expect from me. Sometimes they expect me to know everything, and that's one challenge. But sometimes they treat me as if I've never done the role before and don't even know what a looked after child is, and that's another challenge' (DT7).</p> <p>'I don't think it's an easy role, because of the different expectations of different counties ... it does vary from county to county on what they expect you to do' (DT9).</p> <p>'Just give me a standardised process, just one singular procedure that allows me to meet the expectations - the evidencing and bureaucratic expectations of the local authorities - in a really nice, simplified manner' (DT14).</p>

<p>3.2. Difficulties with joined-up working</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective communication and contact • Education, health and care working out of sync • Difficulties working with social care • Lack of consistency and high turnover with care • Difficulties working with mental health services • Overcapacity in mental health services • Difficulties around timely information sharing • Recognising systemic issues affecting wider agencies • Schools on the frontline for providing support 	<p>'We want to get on and do things, but the interface, particularly with social care, it often doesn't seem that we're moving at the same speed' (DT1).</p> <p>'I feel like we're not always working in tandem and we don't always have all of the information. It's hard to make choices and to move things forward if you don't understand the full picture' (DT2).</p> <p>'There needs to be more - I don't know if it is necessarily closer working, but more effective working between the schools and between social care and between health, particularly the mental health side of things. The way that the three services operate, and the timescales, the speeds at which we work are not synchronised at all' (DT1).</p> <p>'Some counties, you've got really good social workers, they're really good at communicating. Others, it's a very different picture - you can't get hold of them ... It is very much a mixed bag' (DT9).</p> <p>'Multi-agency work is great, when it works ... it's not organised and it's not good enough. And again, I think that's a national issue' (DT14).</p> <p>'Maybe there needs to be some opportunities for virtual schools, designated teachers and social workers to get together and have training all together, because then you will learn about their role, and what their job and what their challenges are' (DT16).</p> <p>'I think the problem with social care is they don't have that consistency of staff. You're trying to build that relationship with the social worker, but the social workers are constantly changing - so the student doesn't have the relationship with them, we don't have the relationship with them, therefore, we don't understand all of the pressures and the factors that they're dealing with' (DT1).</p> <p>'The turnover of social workers in this LA is monstrous. I've barely dealt with the same social worker for two different students in goodness knows how long I've been at this school, in a role where I have to communicate with social workers' (DT7).</p> <p>'The other real big issue is the high turnover. You'd have one social worker one week, and then the next PEP it would be somebody else taking over, so building another relationship' (DT11).</p> <p>'You're contacting social workers and no-one's replying, and you're thinking, this is a major, major issue here ... it is very much dependent on a social worker' (DT2).</p> <p>'Communication can be difficult with social workers - not just social workers who are looking after Looked After Children. And they have a lot on their plate, I get that, but the communication is probably the most difficult thing' (DT7).</p> <p>'You just have to be able to communicate - not on a daily basis, but certainly communicate every little thing, because sometimes with small things with the kids is what makes a big difference' (DT13).</p>
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<p>3.3. Overly bureaucratic process and procedure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex and time-consuming process and procedure • Bureaucracy and red tape • Unintuitive PEP paperwork, process and procedure • Lack of standardised paperwork, process, procedure • Lack of standardised funding procedures • Lack of clarity about how to use funding effectively • Variation in funding procedure • Challenges around using funding meaningfully • Over-justification around funding applications • Working in a broken system • Working hard despite the system 	<p>'Doing their PEP form - that's a real challenge. It's not for the children ... it's to tick a box' (DT5).</p> <p>'There are ways to do things quicker - not everything needs to be this bureaucratic nightmare' (DT6).</p> <p>'The PEP form isn't intuitive, and therefore, you have to think really carefully about what you're filling in where, which takes up a lot of the time' (DT7).</p> <p>'It is insane the amount of time that I spend completing paperwork. What really gets my goat though, apart from the fact that it's not standardised, is that no one ever looks at it' (DT14).</p> <p>'I do an awful lot of tap-dancing for money and I beg and I apply for grants and that sort of thing but it doesn't give me any security and consistency in what I can offer' (DT3).</p> <p>'The government delegates £2300 for our looked after children, but in our area, we only received £1500 of that' (DT5).</p> <p>'I just feel a little bit impotent at times, in terms of what I can actually specifically do for these kids. I can get funding, I can buy an expensive camera, but the resistance you get for saying things like, "I really want to get an educational psychologist for this kid", or "I think this kid could really do with some cognitive behavioural therapy"...' (DT6).</p> <p>'Often, the interventions that I'm asked to put in place or the interventions that are suggested for the students, they tend to be one size fits all. I have to sometimes go back and say, "Actually, that's not going to make any difference to the student"...' (DT13).</p> <p>'I think the biggest challenge is sometimes you have to work hard despite the system, rather than with or because of the system' (DT1).</p> <p>'If I could speak to somebody in the government position, it would be to tell them that the system is broken ... Enter a consultation period. Go and talk to your designated teachers. Find out what's wrong with the system, find out what's wrong with the process, and then redesign it' (DT14).</p> <p>'I'm not only a headteacher but I am a social worker, I am health. We're everything really at the moment, because there's a lack of support out there, so we do it all' (DT5).</p> <p>'Schools have become the front line. And they've always been in the front line really, but now we know that they are the frontline of pastoral support' (DT6).</p> <p>'We're no longer just education people, we are parenting people, we are psychologists, we are sometimes doctors, nurses, trauma specialists. We have to be a jack of all trades. It just concerns me that in these specialist areas, we are master of none.' (DT11).</p>
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Appendix F: Ethical Approval Application

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer is part of the Research Ethics Review Process.

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the complete ethics form to the [UCL Data Protection Office](#). Once your registration number is received, add it to the form* and submit it to your supervisor for approval. If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

Please note that the completion of the [UCL GDPR online training](#) is mandatory for all PhD students.

Section 1 – Project details

- a. Project title: *Exploring the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children.*
- b. Student name and ID number: *16118933*
- c. ***UCL Data Protection Registration Number:** *Z6364106/2020/05/11*
 - a. Date Issued: *04/05/20*
- d. Supervisor/Personal Tutor: *Chloë Marshall and Karen Majors*
- e. Department: *Psychology & Human Development*
- f. Course category (Tick one) PhD
EdD
DEdPsy
- g. **If applicable**, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed: *N/A*
- h. Intended research start date: *April 2020*
- i. Intended research end date: *September 2021*
- j. Country fieldwork will be conducted in: *United Kingdom*
- k. If research to be conducted abroad please check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: [UCL travel advice webpage](#)
- l. Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name: <i>n/a</i>	Date of Approval: <i>n/a</i>
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	go to Section	

If yes:

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 - Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Questionnaires
- Action Research
- Observation
- Literature Review
- Controlled trial/other intervention study
- Use of personal records
- Systematic review – **if only method used go to Section 5**
- Secondary data analysis – **if secondary analysis used go to Section 6**
- Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
- Other, give details:

Please provide an **overview of the project**, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: *purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination*. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

*The **purpose** of the research is to explore the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children, and investigate how statutory recommendations about the role match with practice.*

*The **aims** of the current project are:*

- *To explore how designated teachers experience and enact their role, including key responsibilities and changes over time; barriers and facilitating factors that impact their role; and perceptions around their personal effectiveness.*
- *To understand how designated teachers work with other professionals, including the virtual school, social workers and Educational Psychologists, to support outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children.*
- *To use findings to help inform policy and further identify systems and processes required to advance and support the designated teacher role in England.*

*The key **research questions** for the current project are:*

1. *How do designated teachers perceive, experience and conceptualise their role?*
2. *How do national policy and statutory recommendations about the designated teacher role match with actual practice?*
3. *What barriers and facilitating factors impact designated teachers' sense of personal effectiveness in their role?*
4. *How do designated teachers work with other professionals to support outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children?*

*The **research design** will use a mixed-methods approach to explore the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to gather data using open and closed survey questions and semi-structured telephone interviews. Quantitative data from questionnaires will be analysed using a combination of descriptive statistics and chi-square tests where appropriate. Qualitative data will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify key themes.*

Participants will include a national sample of virtual school staff (i.e. head teacher or another senior member of staff) and designated teachers from both primary and secondary settings. The study aims to gather the views of approximately 40-50 designated teachers from the questionnaire data, and approximately 8-10 follow-up telephone interviews. Additionally, the study hopes gather the views of approximately 30 virtual school staff from questionnaire data to help triangulate findings.

Volunteer sampling will be used during the study, and participants will be recruited by approaching schools, virtual schools and online forums for designated teachers and virtual schools.

The **method of data collection** will be through online surveys (to both virtual school staff and designated teachers), and semi-structured telephone interviews (with designated teachers).

- The **survey for designated teachers** will use open and closed questions to explore:
 - Contextual questions about their school setting, number of staff / pupils / looked after and previously looked after children;
 - The type of provision and support offered to looked after and previously looked after children in the school;
 - Their experiences of being a designated teacher, including key responsibilities, any additional roles undertaken, training opportunities, facilitating factors, challenges and support available;
 - Their experiences of working with other professionals, including the virtual school, social workers and educational psychologists.
- The **survey for virtual school staff** will use open and closed questions to explore:
 - Contextual questions about the virtual school setting, number of staff / looked after and previously looked after children / designated teachers;
 - Their perceptions of the role and responsibilities of designated teachers, including key challenges and facilitating factors facing these professionals;
 - The services, training or support that the virtual school offer to designated teachers, including perceptions on how designated teachers are engaging with support.
- The **semi-structured telephone interviews with designated teachers** will use open questions to explore role perceptions in greater detail, including:
 - Their experiences as a designated teacher, including role expectations, initial and ongoing training or CPD, networking opportunities, key roles and responsibilities and how others perceive their role;
 - Their perceptions on their effectiveness as a designated teacher, including how they measure their sense of effectiveness and where they go to access additional support;
 - Their experiences of working with other professionals, (e.g. the virtual school, social workers and educational psychologists) including an exploration of facilitating factors and challenges.

Findings from the report will be disseminated to all who have taken part in the study.

Section 3 – Research Participants (tick all that apply)

- Early years/pre-school
- Ages 5-11
- Ages 12-16
- Young people aged 17-18
- Adults: *Designated teachers and virtual school staff*
- Unknown – specify below
- No participants

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC).

Section 4 - Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

- a. Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?
Yes* No
- b. Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?
Yes* No
- c. Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?
Yes* No

* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

Section 5 – Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable) – N/A

- a. Will you be collecting any new data from participants? n/a
Yes* No
- b. Will you be analysing any secondary data? n/a
Yes* No

* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments**.

Section 6 - Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable) – N/A

- a. Name of dataset/s n/a
- b. Owner of dataset/s n/a
- c. Are the data in the public domain?
Yes No
If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?
Yes No*
- d. Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?
Yes* No
- e. Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?
Yes No*
- f. **If no**, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?
Yes No*
- g. **If no**, was data collected prior to ethics approval process?
Yes No*

* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**.

If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments**.

Section 7 – Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

- a. Data subjects - who will the data be collected from?
Adults (designated teachers and virtual school staff) via surveys and interviews.
- b. What data will be collected? Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected.
- **Optional:** *Gender and age for demographic purposes only.*
 - **Optional:** *email address for dissemination of study findings and opportunity to be involved in follow-up interview. If participants agree to take part in a follow-up interview, then personal data that may be collected including the participant's name and contact number.*

Is the data anonymised? Yes No*

Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes* No

Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* No

Do you plan to pseudonymise the data? Yes* No

* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

Disclosure – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to?

Results of the project will be disclosed to research supervisors and presented as a doctoral thesis, submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the UCL Institute of Education for Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology (DEdPsy). Results may be considered for publication following thesis submission. Findings from the study will also be disseminated to all participants who have indicated that they would like a follow-up summary of results.

Disclosure – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project?

No – all personal data will be anonymised before processing, and any identifying information about participants (such as name, school, borough etc.) will be removed from the transcriptions making all the data anonymous. Once the final report has been written and summary emailed out to participants, all contact information for participants (i.e. name/email address/phone number) will be destroyed.

- a. **Data storage** – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc.
For transcription purposes, telephone interviews will be recorded (with consent from participants) using UCL's Microsoft teams (with consent from participants) with audio only. The interviews will be stored on UCL's Microsoft Teams/OneDrive until it is downloaded to a UCL password protective drive, transcribed and then deleted. Once the interviews are transcribed, the recordings will be deleted. Quantitative data from the survey will be collected using UCL Opinio or Microsoft Forms and then using a statistical software programme (i.e. SPSS) for analysis. Quantitative results from the survey data will be collated using a statistical software programme (i.e. SPSS) for analysis. All files will be stored securely on a password protected laptop, in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy. Only research supervisors and I will have access to data files. Any identifying contact information about participants will be stored in separate, password protected file location from the transcribed interviews and survey data.
*** Advanced Encryption Standard 256-bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS*
- b. **Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?
Yes No

- c. How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format?

Data will be retained for a minimum of ten years and it will be kept in an electronic format, encrypted with a password on a password protected computer.

Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are)

No

Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.)

No

- d. If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. pseudonymisation and short retention period of data'.

Any identifying information (such as name, school, borough etc.) will be removed from interview transcriptions, making all the data anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used and in place of participant names. Interview audio files will be deleted once transcribed. Contact information will be deleted once the final dissemination of information is complete.

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 8 – Ethical Issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed. **All** issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

Sampling, Recruitment and Gatekeepers

This project intends to collect data from designated teachers and virtual school staff through an online survey and semi-structured telephone interviews. Information about the project will initially be sent to virtual schools, inviting them to participate in an online survey and asking them to disseminate project information and survey link to designated teachers within their borough / county. Information about the project will also be advertised online, through SEN forums and approval and permission will need to be sought from any gatekeeper organisation before advertising the project.

This project will recruit participants using an opt-in approach. Following receipt of information about the research, the potential participant will take an active step in agreeing to participate by following the link to participate in the survey, then actively choosing to attach their email address if they are interested in receiving follow-up information about the project and future involvement (i.e. through a phone interview). While an opt-in approach might lead to lower response rates and potentially a less representative sample, it is the practical option for this study as participants must volunteer willingly.

Informed Consent

Participants will be providing fully informed consent. The participant information sheet and consent form will contain details about the right to withdraw consent at any time, including information about omitting any interview or survey questions that participants do not wish to answer. During interviews, participants will need to confirm their consent to be recorded for transcription purposes and will be reminded that they may withdraw their consent at any time, during or after the interview. All unprocessed data will be destroyed if a participant chooses to withdraw. Contact information for withdrawal of consent will be provided on the initial information sheet.

Safeguarding / child protection

During interviews, it is possible that Designated Teachers will be using examples and information about the Looked After Children they have worked within in their role. In order to safeguard all children in the study, the data will be anonymised and kept securely under the data protection measures outlined in section 7. No other participant will have access to another person's data and the overall results and findings will be coded and anonymised to protect the identity of all participants to prevent any safeguarding / child protection issues from arising.

Risks to participants and/or researchers

While there are no obvious risks of the research, participants' may feel uncomfortable talking about aspects of their professional experiences that have not gone well. To reduce this risk, participants will be informed about the length of the interview and have the choice of a time that is most convenient for them. They will be reminded that their participation is voluntary and that they have the choice to omit any questions or withdraw at any stage and that all content will be anonymous. They will be assured that the purpose of the research is to identify improvements to the system that may ultimately benefit themselves, other designated teachers and/or the families involved in their work. At the end of the interview there will be the opportunity to debrief participants and, if necessary, have any follow up contact. Participants will receive a summary of results after the research is completed. Interviews will take place by phone in a private room where there is no immediate risk to the researcher when conducting the interviews.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

Interviews will be recorded on a password-protected voice recorder (with consent from participants) for transcription purposes only and will be deleted immediately after transcription. Transcription files will be stored on a password protected laptop, in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy. Any identifying information (such as name, school, borough, LA, etc.) will be removed from the survey responses and interview transcriptions, making all the data anonymous, and pseudonyms will be used in place of participant name. Any identifying contact information about participants (i.e. for arranging interview times or for the dissemination of the report findings) will be stored in completely separate, password protected file location and destroyed after final dissemination is complete. Consent will be stored in a separate location from the linked data with the same regard to the confidentiality and anonymity protocols of the research.

Disclosures / limits to confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained in all situations unless the participant discloses that someone is at risk of immediate harm, in which case I will have to inform my supervisors. This information will be included in the pre-interview brief, so participants are aware. As I will be arranging, undertaking and transcribing interviews, complete anonymity of participants is not possible as I will be aware of the participants' identities. However, the above measures will be taken to ensure that the information is kept securely and confidentially. While I am invested in the project's completion, I remain independent from the outcome of the research and have no conflicts of interest or partiality over the results.

Data storage and security

For transcription purposes, interviews will be recorded (with consent from participants) using a password protected voice recorder. The voice recorder will be stored securely in a locked cupboard in a locked room, once interviews are transcribed, recordings will be deleted. Transcribed interview files and collated survey data will be stored on a password protected laptop. Only myself and my research supervisors will have access to these

files. Should the voice recorder or laptop be stolen/lost, this data will remain on the devices but due to the secure encryption, this should not pose a risk. Once transcribed, recordings will be deleted, and all data will be anonymised and coded to prevent any personal or private information revealing the identities of participants.

Reporting, Dissemination and use of findings

All participants will be asked if they would like to receive follow-up about the project findings. If so, participants will have the choice to leave their email address and findings from the report will be disseminated once the reported has been completed and a summary of findings created. Participants' email addresses will not be linked to their survey data to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Once the report has been completed and the summary emailed out to participants, all contact information will be destroyed. Upon completion of the research an electronic and printed copy of the dissertation will be submitted to UCL's Institute of Education as per course requirements. The project may be considered for publication.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual.

Yes

Section 9 – Attachments. Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

- a. Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research (List attachments below)

Yes No

- Information sheets for virtual school staff / designated teachers
- Consent forms for virtual school staff / designated teachers
- Draft survey questions for virtual school staff / designated teachers
- Draft interview question for designated teachers

- b. Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee Yes
- c. The proposal ('case for support') for the project Yes
- d. Full risk assessment Yes

Section 10 – Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.

Yes No

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.

Yes No

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name Lauren Ruth Boesley

Date 14/04/2020

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor must refer the application to the Research Development Administrator via email so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name	Lauren Boesley
Student department	Psychology & Human Development
Course	Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology (DEdPsy)
Project title	Exploring the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children.

Reviewer 1

Supervisor/first reviewer name	Prof. Chloë Marshall
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	I am satisfied that Lauren has thought very carefully about the ethical issues raised in this study and that there is minimal risk to participants.
Supervisor/first reviewer signature	
Date	30 th April 2020

Reviewer 2

Second reviewer name	Dr Karen Majors
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	No, ethical issues have been carefully addressed.
Supervisor/second reviewer signature	
Date	11 th May 2020

Decision on behalf of reviews

Decision	Approved
	Approved subject to the following additional measures
	Not approved for the reasons given below
	Referred to REC for review
Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC	
Comments from reviewers for the applicant	

Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk.

Appendix G: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Participants

Virtual school letter

Dear Virtual School Head,

My name is Lauren Boesley, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. My research supervisors are Chloë Marshall and Karen Majors.

I am completing my doctoral thesis on the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children. The purpose of the research is to try and understand how designated teachers experience their role by exploring key challenges and facilitating factors. Additionally, the research will explore how designated teachers work with other professionals, including as the virtual school, to support outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children.

We aim to gather views of both designated teachers and the virtual school through a short questionnaire (approx. 10-12 minutes). I hope you will be interested in helping with this important project.

If you would like to support the research:

- Please ask one member of staff from your virtual school to complete the questionnaire;
- Please forward information about this project to the designated teachers in your area to complete the questionnaire.

Both virtual school staff and designated teachers can access the questionnaire through this link: *[finalised hyperlink will be inserted here, containing information sheet, consent and survey questions]*.

By taking part in this research, you will be helping to identify systems and processes that can advance and support the designated teacher role. Once the project is complete, you will receive a copy of the report that summarises key findings.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Lauren Boesley

Information Sheet

My name is Lauren Boesley, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am inviting you to take part in my thesis research on exploring the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children.

I am hoping to understand how designated teachers experience their role, and how they work with other professionals, including the virtual school, to support outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children. This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me for any further queries.

Project title

Exploring the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children.

Why are we doing this research?

Despite holding a key role in promoting outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children in schools, there is surprisingly little research about the designated teacher role in practice.

The aims of this research are:

1. To explore how designated teachers experience and enact their role, including key responsibilities and challenges and facilitating factors that impact their role.
2. To understand how designated teachers work with other professionals, including the virtual school, to support outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children.
3. To use findings to help inform policy and further identify systems and processes required to advance and support the designated teacher role.

Why am I being invited to take part?

You have been asked to participate because you are either:

- a designated teacher; or
- a member of the virtual school (i.e. Virtual School Head or key professional responsible for supporting designated teachers).

We are inviting designated teachers to provide a first-hand account about how they undertake and experience their role; while virtual school staff will be able to provide key information about how the virtual school works with and supports designated teachers.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

Both designated teachers and virtual school staff will be asked to complete a short **questionnaire** about your experiences working with, or being, a designated teacher.

Following the questionnaire, designated teachers can choose to take part in a **telephone interview** (approx. 30 minutes) at a convenient date and time. The interview aims to gather further information about the designated teacher role and experiences, but you will have complete control over what information you choose to tell me about and can omit any questions you do not wish to answer.

Both designated teachers and virtual school staff have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and all unprocessed data will be destroyed.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Feedback from questionnaires will be collected and collated using an online, password protected survey platform. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your data and your contributions will stay anonymous.

Feedback during interviews will be audio recorded to ensure I have accurate records. Once transcribed, recordings will be deleted. Anonymised quotes may be used in the final report but any identifiable information (such as your name or the names of any children, staff, or school) will not be stored on transcripts. No identifying information will be used in any reports following the project.

Only my supervisors and I will have access to the data. Anonymised responses from questionnaires and interviews will form the basis of this research and will be used for academic purposes only, to help promote a greater understanding of the designated teacher role. Results may be presented at conferences or published in academic journals, however participant's right to confidentiality will be respected if the data is used in any report or publication.

Do I have to take part?

We hope that you would like to contribute to this study, but the decision is yours. If you choose to take part, you can still withdraw from the project at any time and any unprocessed data will be destroyed. You do not have to give a reason for your decision.

What happens to the results of the study?

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings from the report, please leave your email address at the end of the questionnaire. Please note, your email address will *not* be linked to your questionnaire and responses will stay confidential and anonymous.

What if I have any questions or concerns?

If you have any additional queries or concerns, please contact me directly in the first instance. If you are unhappy with the response, please contact either of my research supervisors:

- Lauren Boesley (Researcher) Institute of Education: l.boesley.16@ucl.ac.uk
- Chloë Marshall (Research Supervisor) UCL Institute of Education: chloe.marshall@ucl.ac.uk
- Karen Majors (Research Supervisor) UCL Institute of Education: k.majors@ucl.ac.uk

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice: For participants in research studies, click [here](#)

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data are: 'Public task' for personal data. Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Consent Form

Title: Exploring the role of designated teachers for looked after and previously looked after children.

Researchers: Lauren Boesley, supervised by Chloë Marshall and Karen Majors.

If you would like to participate in the study, please complete the following consent form:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for this research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions and have these questions answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my responses will be recorded and analysed for the purpose of completing the above research project.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time; any unprocessed data will be destroyed. I understand that it will no longer be possible to withdraw my data once it has been anonymously collated for analysis.
4. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis and will be confidential as detailed in the information sheet. I understand who will have access to my personal data and how the data will be anonymised, stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.
5. I give permission for data to be analysed and used for academic purposes, to inform and I understand that results may be shared in research publications and presentations.
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Participant's Name (Printed)*

Participant's Signature*

Date

If you have any questions or would like further information about this research, including to withdraw consent, please contact: Lauren Boesley (Researcher) UCL Institute of Education: l.boesley.16@ucl.ac.uk

**Participants wishing to maintain further anonymity may use their initials (from the British Psychological Society Guidelines for Minimal Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research).*

Thank you for your involvement in the project.

Appendix H: Supplementary Tables from Questionnaire Findings

Table 14
Examples of Support Offered by Virtual Schools (n=44)

Key area of support	Frequency	Percentage
Training opportunities	38	86%
General advice and support	26	59%
Networking opportunities and forums	25	57%
Annual conferences	12	27%
Resources	9	20%
Support during PEPs	8	18%
Coordinating provision for individual pupils	5	11%
Quality assurance	3	7%
Additional funding	2	5%

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Table 15
Examples of Support Offered by EP Services to Virtual Schools (n=33)

Key support	Details	Frequency (%)
Training	For a range of stakeholders (e.g. trauma and attachment; metacognition and self-regulated learning)	23 (70%)
Assessment	Direct work with children; EHC Needs Assessments; supporting the completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires	21 (64%)
Consultation	With schools, parents/carers, professionals and virtual school staff (including Circle of Adults, and joint problem-solving)	11 (33%)
General advice or strategies	For a range of stakeholders around working with CLA and supporting varying needs	10 (30%)
Systemic work	Including resiliency and transition projects; attachment-aware and trauma-informed initiatives; raising the profile of CLA	6 (18%)
Supervision	For school staff, DTs, and virtual school staff	5 (15%)
Interventions	Therapeutic interventions such as Theraplay, VIG, therapeutic parenting, and direct transition support for CLA	3 (9%)

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Table 16*Virtual School Perceptions about Key Challenges Faced by DTs (n=44)*

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (%)
<i>DTs' workload and position in schools</i>	Lack of time to devote to the role	35 (80%)
	Lack of seniority in the school	12 (27%)
	High workload and overcapacity	9 (20%)
<i>Understanding the needs of CLA and how to support them in schools</i>	DTs' experience and understanding about the needs of CLA	9 (20%)
	The complex and individual needs of CLA	6 (14%)
	Lack of direct contact with CLA at school	1 (2%)
	Difficulties using funding effectively	3 (7%)
<i>Understanding and awareness about the DT role</i>	Lack of understanding or support from staff	11 (25%)
	Lack of awareness about the role	1 (2%)
<i>Systemic challenges</i>	Difficulties with joined-up working	4 (9%)
	Lack of attachment-aware/trauma-informed policies in school	2 (5%)
	Lack of standardisation between counties	2 (5%)

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Table 17*Designated Teachers' Perceptions About How They Measured their Effectiveness (n=142)*

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (%)
<i>Measuring progress and outcomes for CLA</i>	Academic outcomes	54 (38%)
	Wellbeing outcomes	54 (38%)
	Monitoring academic and wellbeing progress	53 (37%)
<i>Receiving feedback</i>	Feedback from stakeholders	47 (33%)
	Quality assurance	24 (17%)
<i>Connections with others</i>	Building relationships	28 (20%)
	Collaboration and communication	34 (24%)
<i>Understanding and meeting children's needs</i>	Identifying needs and providing support	38 (27%)
	Understanding the needs of care-experienced children	21 (15%)
<i>Meeting statutory duties</i>	Administrative and operational tasks	15 (11%)
	Actioning PEP targets	16 (11%)

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Table 18
Designated Teachers' Perceptions on Key Challenges they Faced in the Role (n=142)

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (%)
<i>Bureaucracy and administration</i>	Working with multiple LAs	31 (22%)
	Paperwork, process and procedure	26 (18%)
	Funding	20 (14%)
	Identifying previously looked after children	1 (1%)
<i>Time and workload</i>	Lack of time	42 (30%)
	Managing workloads	31 (22%)
<i>Understanding and awareness about the needs of care-experienced children and the role of DTs</i>	Managing the individual needs of each child	28 (20%)
	Staff engagement and understanding about care-experienced children	22 (15%)
	Awareness and understanding about the DT role	9 (6%)
	Manging expectations about school capacity	5 (4%)
	Lack of support for DTs	9 (6%)
<i>Multiagency working</i>	Contact and communication with other agencies	15 (11%)
	Working with social care	26 (18%)
	Access to services and support	16 (11%)
<i>Unprecedented times</i>	Covid-19	5 (4%)

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Table 19
Designated Teachers' Perceptions About Support that Could Improve their Role (n=142)

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (%)
<i>Support for DTs</i>	More time to enact their duties	32 (23%)
	Having a reduced or shared workload	11 (8%)
	More training about the role for DTs	17 (12%)
	Networking and supervision opportunities	1 (1%)
<i>Support when working with wider stakeholders</i>	Greater collaboration and joined-up working with professionals	22 (15%)
	More training and greater understanding about the needs of care-experienced children in school	18 (13%)
	Increased awareness and recognition about the DT role	5 (4%)
<i>Support in the wider system</i>	Greater consistency or standardisation between LAs	18 (13%)
	Improved systems and processes	9 (6%)
<i>Support for CLA</i>	More funding	11 (8%)
	Access to more resources/support for care-experienced children	14 (10%)

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Table 20
Factors Impacting DT's Experiences Working with Social Care (n=142)

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (%)
<i>Capacity and resources in social care</i>	Variability between individuals and LAs	55 (39%)
	High caseloads, overcapacity and reduced resources	23 (16%)
	Recognition of systemic challenges faced by social care	3 (2%)
<i>Communication and contact between social care and schools</i>	Lack of communication and contact from social workers	41 (29%)
	Good communication and contact with social workers	26 (18%)
<i>Joined-up working between school and social care</i>	Lack of joint working/understanding about school processes	14 (10%)
	Unrealistic expectations placed on schools	2 (1%)
	Effective joined-up working between school and social care	26 (18%)
	Acting in the best interest of the child	11 (8%)
<i>Consistency of care</i>	Social workers frequently changing	37 (26%)
	High turnover of social workers	10 (7%)
	Good consistency of care with social workers	3 (2%)

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.

Table 21
Input or Support Provided to DTs by EPs (N=89)

Input or support	Frequency	Percentage
Consultation with staff and parents/carers	64	72%
Assessment of children's needs	50	56%
Training for staff	13	15%
Interventions with CLA	7	8%
Systemic support	2	2%

Note: Participants could provide multiple responses in free text.