Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child, and Adolescent Psychology

Programme Director: Vivian Hill

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Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists

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May 2022

Word count:
34,980

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology (DEdPsy)

Declaration

I, Charlotte Brenton, 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.

Signed: ███████████

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of several special people.

I would first like to thank all participants. To the young people, thank you for so kindly sharing your life experiences with me. This project is built upon your incredible thoughts and reflections, and I hope that together through this study, we are able to prompt developments to the available support and to perceptions of autism, contributing to the positive change you hope to see in the world. To the Supported Employment Programme (SEP) staff - your thoughtful considerations and reflections are incredibly valuable. I will be forever grateful to you for taking the time to participate and for making me feel so welcome amongst your group – thank you.

I would like to say a special thank you to my supervisors, Dr Emily Midouhas and Dr Chris Clarke, for being so interested in my ideas and supporting me throughout the research process. Your kind and welcoming approach made it an absolute joy to work with you both. Your support and guidance developed my thinking and research skills hugely – thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my family whom I owe a great deal. I am forever indebted to my parents for giving me the opportunities, guidance and love that has made me able to achieve what I have. Dad, I miss you more than I can say. You were bursting with pride when I secured a place on this course, and I know you would be so proud of this achievement. I would like to dedicate this piece of work to you to go some way in showing how much you mean to me. Thank you for always believing in me. Mum, you are my best friend and the strongest and most inspiring woman I know. I simply could not have done this without you. To my constant source of support, encouragement, love and laughter, my fiancé Tam. You have been my rock through this whole course, and I cannot wait to marry you! To my big brother, Daryll, who I know is very proud of his little sister. Thank you for everything you do for me. And to my beautiful nephews whom I couldn't adore more, Ralph and Rupert. You both fill me with so much love I could burst, and have shown the most inspiring resilience from which I have learnt so much. I love you all.

Abstract

Unemployment amongst the autistic population is high, yet research is emerging suggesting that Supported Employment Programmes (SEPs) can enable many Young People (YP) to make this transition successfully. However, this research overwhelmingly adopts quantitative methods to reach such conclusions, limiting our understanding of these YP's experiences of such support. Further, eliciting their views is increasingly recognised as crucial in developing appropriate support. Additionally, this, along with the lack of literature regarding the Educational Psychologist's (EP's) role with this population and within such settings, restricts the development of EP practice, pertinent since the extensions to their role (now working with YP up to 25 years old; DfE, 2014). The current research sought to firstly explore the views and experiences of autistic YP's opportunities for, and barriers to, employment, what support from an autism-specific SEP they find helpful, and what further support they feel is required to better support them into employment. Secondly, the EP's role within SEP settings was explored, guided by these YP's perspectives. This two-phase research study consisted of semi-structured interviews with eight autistic YP with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in their final year of a 2-year autism-specific SEP, followed by a focus group with 7 SEP staff members. Findings, analysed through thematic analysis, are presented through five themes; 1) 'conceptualising autism: the combination and interaction of individual and environmental barriers'; 2) 'autism identities: juxtaposed feelings'; 3) 'the value of practical learning alongside understanding, adjustments and advocacy'; 4) 'hopes for increased independence, understanding, acceptance and support'; and 5) 'valuable contributions from EPs/EPSs to support SEP students learning, wellbeing, support and outcomes'. Findings have implications for a range of stakeholders with key roles in improving

employment outcomes for this population, including SEPs, EPs, a range of other professionals, Local Authorities (LAs), government, and more broadly, society.

Impact Statement

This research study was designed to provide a vital contribution to both academic knowledge and professional practice relating to autistic YP's views and experiences of the barriers to, and opportunities for, employment, what support provided by an autism-specific SEP they have found helpful, and what further support they feel they require. Most notably, this study provided a platform for autistic YP to express their views, with me adopting the role as advocate in sharing their voices to a wider audience. This hopefully results in empowerment and feelings of being valued, heard, and understood for this population, an integral component of conducting research collaboratively with the people who are directly impacted by the topics being researched. Additionally, the findings of this study contribute to broadening and increasing the existing evidence relating to beneficial support for the population of autistic YP during their transitions to employment and the gaps within this. This research will consequently assist with the development of SEP support in line with these autistic YP's voices, as well as support more generally provided by a range of services for this population, such as EPs, and adult services/supports they are eligible to access. This research also demonstrates that these YP's voices can be elicited and accessed, providing guidance and a reference point for future research aiming to do so in the future. The impact of this thesis on practice will be facilitated through the dissemination of findings in various methods. Firstly, research findings will be fed back to participants, the SEP management team, and consequently distributed to all SEP staff and students. A brief summary and more accessible version will be created and made available for all SEP students. This research will also be presented at UCL Institute of Education's thesis sharing event in June 2022, accessed by all three cohorts of the Professional Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent

Psychology (DEdPsy), along with course tutors. Findings will also be shared with my placement Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in July 2022, and my new EPS in September 2022. Lastly, the full thesis will be available online through the university library, and I hope to achieve publication of this study in a peer-reviewed journal/journals targeted at the EP audience.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
APA	American Psychiatric Association
ASC	Autism Spectrum Condition
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BASE	British Association for Supported Employment
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CYP	Child/Children or Young Person/People
DfE	Department for Education
DSM-5	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ICD-11	International Classification of Diseases, 11th Edition
LA	Local Authority
MAPS	Making Action Plans
MM	Medical Model
NAS	National Autistic Society
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PATH	Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope
PfA	Preparing for Adulthood
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SEP	Supported Employment Programme
SMD	Social Model of Disability
TA	Thematic Analysis
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UK	United Kingdom
WHO	World Health Organisation
YP	Young Person/People

Chapter 1: Introduction

This section outlines the rationale for the current research, including identification of current gaps within the literature and the research implications. An overview of the research aims and questions will be presented. My motivation for selecting this research area will also be explored, followed by an explanation for the adoption of person-first language throughout this research.

1.1 Rationale for Current Research

Research that explores how autistic Young People (YP) can be supported into employment is warranted. Unemployment amongst the autistic population is high (Mavranezouli et al., 2014), and there is evidence to suggest that many autistic adults experience unemployment for much of their lives (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). Securing employment can be particularly challenging for this population for numerous reasons (Howlin et al., 2005). Yet, increasing evidence has suggested that Supported Employment Programmes (SEPs) can enable some autistic YP to make this transition successfully. A SEP is a scheme consisting of work placements with on-the-job coaching for students, classroom teaching of academic and work-related skills, and advice and guidance for employers around implementation of reasonable workplace adjustments (Melling et al., 2011). Previous research on the efficacy of SEPs has primarily used quantitative approaches and has examined objective outcomes such as employment rates following this support (Howlin et al., 2005; Mawhood & Howlin, 1999; Richards, 2019). Where explorations of autistic YPs' views relating to SEPs have been explored, these studies have also used quantitative methods to do so (Howlin et al., 2005). This restricts the depth of understanding of the thoughts and experiences of the YP who participate in SEPs. Therefore, very little is known about

the lived experiences of autistic YP transitioning into employment and receiving such support, with their voices being under-represented within research (Scott et al., 2018).

However, there is increasing acknowledgement that these YP are the experts in their own lives, and we can only learn how to best support an individual by learning from that individual themselves (Winestone et al., 2014). Furthermore, the importance of gathering and listening to the views of autistic YP (aged 0-25 years), and those diagnosed with other Special Educational Needs (SEN), has become increasingly recognised since its promotion within recent updates to relevant legislation (such as The Children and Families Act [Department for Education, 2014]; SEND Code of Practice [Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015]). This reinforces the need for this gap in the literature to be addressed.

The findings of this research has implications for SEPs, including that they may enable such settings to develop support packages in line with the views of the YP for whom these programmes are designed. Moreover, they will also have implications for a range of professionals, including Educational Psychologists (EPs). Since the introduction of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs; replacing Statements of SEN) within the Children and Families Act (2014), the statutory role of the EP has been extended to involve supporting individuals with SEN up to 25 years of age. Although many recognise the opportunities this has created for more YP to access support from Educational Psychology Services (EPSs), working with this age-group was previously uncharted territory for EPs (Apter et al., 2019), and they have experienced numerous challenges in adapting their practice accordingly (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). There is insufficient evidence available, including autistic YP's views

and experiences of the support they receive to guide EP practice. Furthermore, EPs report that many of the settings available for this age-group are not commissioning EP support, resulting in reduced opportunities for EPs to support this age-group since this extension to their role (Payne, 2020). Not only does this restrict the development of EP practice in line with their newly extended remit, but also the YP's access to support from an EPS, something they are eligible for since the changes in legislation. This is an important consideration, as in line with autistic YP's call for future research to not only gather their perspectives on the support they receive, they also express wanting research to be conducted in a way that ensures it can have direct impact on their lives, something they feel can often fail to happen (Pellicano et al., 2013, 2014). The practical application of the research findings with regard to educational psychology practice will also be considered and explored within this research in an attempt to address such barriers. This approach should therefore raise the level of impact this research can have on the lives of autistic YP, whilst contributing to the development of the EP's role with this population.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

The present study aims to qualitatively explore autistic YP's views and experiences of transitioning from school to employment and participating in an autism-specific SEP. More specifically, this research will aim to build a deeper understanding of autistic YP's views and lived experiences of employment opportunities/barriers, the support they have received from the SEP that they have found helpful, and what additional support they feel is required in order to feel better supported/ready for employment. Guided by (and in response to) these views and experiences, and working in collaboration with SEP staff, this research will consider the potential role for EPs in supporting these YP

within SEP settings. This research hopes to shed light on the following research questions:

1. What are autistic YP's views and experiences of the opportunities for, and barriers to, employment for the autistic population?

2. What support provided by an autism-specific SEP do autistic YP find helpful in supporting them into employment?

3. What additional support do autistic YP feel should be provided by an autism-specific SEP to better support them into employment?

4. How can EPs and EPSs support autistic YP within SEP settings?

1.3 Researcher's Background and Motivation for this Research

Many factors motivated me to select this research area. My previous professional experiences working with autistic Children and Young People (CYP) in various educational settings (such as mainstream and specialist) and particularly in supporting their transitions into employment, is where my passion to develop deeper understandings of these YPs' experiences began. My current role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) has strengthened this, where I have become increasingly dedicated to eliciting the voices of, and advocating for, all CYP I work with, particularly those who may not otherwise be heard. Within this role, I have a particular interest in enabling autistic YP to make successful transitions into adulthood, in line with the YP's aspirations and hopes for the future. This, along with the poor unemployment rates amongst the autistic population, and the lack of this population's voices within relevant research, has motivated me to contribute to the literature in this area. Furthermore, I am eager to maintain and advance the standards of practice within the profession of educational psychology. I am particularly interested in doing

this in relation to EPs' work with autistic YP who aim to secure employment, in a way that is responsive to the YPs' views and lived experiences, recognising this is a valuable contribution.

1.3.1 A Note on the Researcher's use of Identity-First Language

According to Bottema-Beutel et al. (2020) 'what people say or write produces specific versions of the world, oneself and others, and language conveys, shapes, and perpetuates ideologies' (p. 3). It is therefore important that terminology around autism is selected carefully and sensitively due to the role this language may play in framing concepts, perceptions and stigma toward autism (Gernsbacher, 2017). Although there is no clear consensus within the literature regarding the autistic population's preferred terminology for when referring to the autistic population (Vivanti, 2020), the current and existing understanding has informed the language used throughout this research. As found by numerous authors (Bury et al., 2020; Kapp et al., 2013; Kenny et al., 2016) the least preferred and most offensive language to this population is person first language (PFL), such as 'person with autism'. Studies have found that this is due to the negative connotations associated with using such terminology, often used to signify the presence of a form of pathology or illness, with 'autism' easily substituted for terms such as 'cancer' or 'liver disease' for example (Botha et al., 2021). Identity-first language (IFL), such as 'autistic person', seems to be the current preference expressed by this population, as it is increasingly endorsed as an expression of positive social identity and empowerment (Bury et al., 2020; Vivanti, 2020). This research will therefore lend the author's support to the current preference expressed by autistic people, by adopting this term throughout.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section presents a review of the literature relating to autism and employment. First, the methodology for this literature review is presented. Second, current understanding of autism and the relationship between autism and employment opportunities is reviewed. Models of disability in relation to autistic YP's employment opportunities are discussed, followed by an exploration of the current literature regarding SEPs and identification of gaps within this. Lastly, the government response to post-16 support needs and the current understanding around the implications for EPs within the United Kingdom (UK) will be considered, before an overview of the current study's rationale, research aims, and research questions will be presented.

2.1 Methodology for the Literature Review

The existing literature was searched using terms such as *autism*, *Asperger*, *employment*, *supported employment* and *educational psychologist*, using databases including ProQuest, PsycInfo, PsycArticles, ProQuest, the 'UCL Explore' library search and Google Scholar. A complete list of the search terms used can be found in Appendix A. To identify the most recent and relevant literature, the date range was adjusted to show articles published since 2015, in response to the updates to relevant legislation (For example, the Children and Families Act, 2014; SEND Code of Practice, 2015). However, due to the minimal research that has explored this area, relevant research prior to this date that explored the efficacy of, and autistic YP's experiences of participating in, a SEP and/or the EP's role in supporting this population, was also considered.

2.2 Autism

Autism (or Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition; ASD/ASC) was first described clinically by Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger in the 1940s (Kanner, 1943; Asperger, 1944). It is also often referred to as high-functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome, although these classifications are no longer clinically diagnosed (Hayes, 2019). Autism is described in two main classification manuals, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5; APA, 2013) and the International Classification of Diseases, 11th Edition (ICD-11; World Health Organisation; WHO, 2022). Although the DSM-5 is considered the main diagnosis reference tool worldwide (Hayes, 2019), the ICD is most commonly used in the UK (National Autistic Society; NAS, 2016). According to the ICD-11, autism is understood as a 'neurodevelopmental condition', characterised by persistent difficulties with social communication/interaction, restricted, repetitive, and inflexible behaviour and interests/activities that are atypical or excessive for the individual's age and sociocultural context (WHO, 2022; see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. *Essential Features for Autism Diagnosis According to the ICD-11 (WHO, 2022)*

Social Communication and Interaction Difficulties	**Possible Manifestations of Difficulty:** • Difficulties relating to understanding of, interest in, or inappropriate responses to the verbal or non-verbal social communications of others. • Difficulties with integration of spoken language with typical complimentary non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, gestures, facial expressions and body language. These non-verbal behaviours may also be reduced in frequency or intensity. • Reduced understanding and use of language in social contexts and ability to initiate and sustain reciprocal social conversations. • Limited social awareness, leading to behaviour that is not appropriately modulated according to the social context. • Limited ability to imagine and respond to the feelings, emotional states, and attitudes of others. • Limited mutual sharing of interests. • Difficulties relating to ability to make and sustain typical peer relationships
Restricted, Repetitive, and Inflexible Behaviour and Interests/ Activities that are Atypical or Excessive	**Possible Manifestations of Difficulty:** • Lack of adaptability to new experiences and circumstances, with associated distress, that can be evoked by trivial changes to a familiar environment or in response to unanticipated events. • Inflexible adherence to particular routines; for example, these may be geographic such as following familiar routes, or may require precise timing such as mealtimes or transport. • Excessive adherence to rules (e.g., when playing games). • Excessive and persistent ritualized patterns of behaviour (e.g., preoccupation with lining up or sorting objects in a particular way) that serve no apparent external purpose. • Repetitive and stereotyped motor movements, such as whole-body movements (e.g., rocking), atypical gait (e.g., walking on tiptoes), unusual hand or finger movements and posturing. These behaviours are particularly common during early childhood. • Persistent preoccupation with one or more special interests, parts of objects, or specific types of stimuli (including media) or an unusually strong attachment to particular objects (excluding typical comforters). • Lifelong excessive and persistent hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sensory stimuli or unusual interest in a sensory stimulus, which may include actual or anticipated sounds, light, textures (especially clothing and food), odours and tastes, heat, cold, or pain.

2.2.1 Diagnosis and Prevalence

Although there is evidence that children can be diagnosed with autism at as young as 24 months old (Corsello et al., 2013; Steiner et al., 2012), Hosazawa, et al. (2020) found that 79% of autistic children born around 2000-2001 in a general population sample in the United Kingdom (UK) were diagnosed when they were 5 years old or above, with 28% of those diagnosed whilst attending secondary school.

Consistent with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines, an autism diagnosis is usually agreed upon by a multidisciplinary team (a range of health professionals from different disciplines, such as clinical psychology, paediatrics, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy). Several factors

are considered, including parental concerns and information regarding the YP's developmental history, demonstration of such behaviours during observations, clinical providers' experience, rating instruments and the clinically agreed upon diagnostic guidelines set within the DSM-5 or ICD-11 (Kulage et al., 2019). Autism, derived from professionals with traditional expert knowledge in the area and experience of working with the autistic population, therefore remains a behaviourally defined clinical diagnosis (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017). The nature of such diagnosis and the diagnostic criteria means that individual strategies such as masking and camouflaging behaviours (potentially demonstrated more often by females than males; Loomes et al., 2017) can cause difficulties accurately identifying and diagnosing the condition (Wilson et al., 2016). Therefore, although it is argued that accurate figures may be much higher, the latest statistics report that 1.1% of the population in England is currently diagnosed as autistic, with prevalence seemingly considerably higher in men (1.9%) than women (0.2%; Brugha et al, 2016).

Acknowledging the increased prevalence of autism in males, the DSM-5 states that autism is diagnosed four times more often in males than in females (APA, 2013). This suggests a 4:1 gender ratio (male-to-female), which is supported within some prevalence studies of autism (Fombonne, 2009). However, such estimates do not use meta-analysis to synthesize their findings, as they do not consider factors such as sample size, design, and study quality, giving equal weight to all reviewed studies, irrespective of these considerations (Loomes et al., 2017). Addressing these concerns, these researchers conducted the first meta-analysis of the autism gender prevalence based on a systematic review of epidemiologic prevalence studies, concluding that this ratio is closer to 3:1 (male-to-female). However, the researchers highlight in their

conclusion that autistic girls are at greater risk than boys of having their ASD overlooked, misdiagnosed, or identified late, meaning that this figure could be even higher for girls in reality. Furthermore, they also acknowledge that as they reviewed studies of childhood and adolescence only, this figure of 3:1 therefore may not represent the adult autistic population. They considered that as autistic females who were missed in childhood refer themselves for assessment and self-report symptoms, this figure would change, creating a male-to-female ratio that may reflect increased rates of autistic females. This notion is consistent with Mandy et al.'s (2022) findings that autistic females are more likely to be diagnosed at older ages than autistic males.

2.2.2 Conceptualisation of Autism

Autism is recognised as a spectrum condition/disability, as each associated difficulty can range from mild to severe for each individual (Ornoy et al., 2015). However, autism defined as a 'lifelong neurodevelopmental disability' (Scott et al., 2018, p. 869) suggests that for all autistic individuals, the diagnosis, and associated difficulties, will continue into (and throughout) adulthood, creating life-long challenges in several aspects of their lives (Gilchrist et al., 2001). Such views and perceptions of autism are beginning to be questioned, however, as many autistic scholars and self-advocates are voicing their concerns over how autism has been conceptualised as deficit-based (Dinishak & Akhtar, 2013; McGuire & Michalko, 2011; Milton, 2012; Yergeau, 2013). They state autism should be viewed as a form of diversity (rather than a pathology) and promote the notion of 'neurodiversity', a term that proposes autism is a 'neuro-variation' (Cascio, 2012). Autistic people have begun increasingly expressing concern that locating the difficulties within the autistic person facilitates misconceptions of, and

stigma toward, autistic people, having a negative impact on their ability to participate fully within society.

2.3 Autism and Employment

As YP transition into adulthood, employment is often a goal and aspiration, associated with wide ranging benefits including increased independence (Stevens & Martin, 1999) financial stability, increased confidence and self-esteem, improved health and wellbeing, and positive social lives (Department for Education; DfE, 2022). However, an examination of literature on the transition to employment for autistic YP yields sobering results.

Despite evidence indicating that many autistic people want to work, they experience high rates of unemployment. Autistic people are much less likely to be employed than their typically developing peers (Howlin, 2000) and are the least likely to be employed when compared with any other disabled group (with disability defined as within the Equality Act; 2010; Autistica, 2021). According to the most recent UK-wide statistics, around half of all disabled people (52.1%) aged 16 to 64 years were employed in 2020, compared with around 8 in 10 (81.3%) of non-disabled people. Of that group, just 21.7% of autistic people were in employment (Office for National Statistics; ONS, 2021).

2.3.1 Benefits of Employment

The importance and benefits of employment for autistic people, however, are clear. Employment may not only be a means to financial gain, but is also intrinsically linked to many aspects of individual wellbeing. Participation in society through employment has been found to lead to feelings of social inclusion (Gannon & Nolan, 2007; Jahoda et al., 2009). Furthermore, research by Katz et al. (2015) explored the link between

employment and quality of life (a psychological concept that includes basic needs such as water, food, and shelter but also other factors including productivity and belongingness). They found a strong association between success at work and feelings of general fulfilment, independence, belongingness and self-efficacy in autistic people. Banks et al. (2010) also found a relationship between employment and increased self-esteem amongst this population. Similarly, research has found that unemployment amongst the autistic population is reported to have a negative impact on socioeconomic status, quality of life, social inclusion, independence and mental health (Fleming et al., 2013; Gerhardt & Lainer, 2011; Howlin & Magiati, 2017; Howlin et al., 2005; Wanberg, 2012). Therefore, as suggested by Richards (2012), improving employment outcomes for the autistic individuals is likely to improve mental health and wellbeing for this population.

2.3.2 Barriers to Employment

Research indicates that social communication/interaction difficulties may impact an individual's ability to engage with job application processes, interact and communicate with employers and/or co-workers, and/or integrate into a workplace culture (Baldwin et al., 2014; Krieger et al., 2012; Müller et al., 2003). Similar findings are presented in research conducted by Richards (2012), who explored how the difficulties associated with Asperger's Syndrome specifically, impact accessibility and maintenance of employment amongst this population. He found that social communication/interaction difficulties can mean these individuals have difficulty asking for help when in the workplace, and can be more vulnerable to workplace teasing due to low awareness of how they come across to others and the impact of their behaviours on those around them. However, such identified barriers to employment for these YP seem to be

overwhelmingly constructed by professionals or YPs' parents/carers, rather than reflecting the YPs' own views.

It has also been suggested that employment for autistic individuals commonly occurs within potentially challenging environments associated with, for example, the person's sensory needs (Leonard et al., 2010; Müller et al., 2003; Nord et al., 2016; Richards, 2012). Therefore, workplace adjustments to secure and maintain employment are needed (Hagner & Cooney, 2005). There is evidence to suggest that such requirements can possibly make autistic individuals appear unsuitable to prospective employers (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). Employers may have concerns relating to the costs of making adjustments, additional supervision requirements, sick leave, and employee productivity issues (Hernandez & McDonald, 2010; Ju et al., 2013; Unger, 2002). As suggested by Richards (2012), such concerns can result in this population being 'unanticipated and uninvited guests' within many workplace organisations (p. 634), with Harvery et al (2021) adding that employers may therefore be less likely to employ autistic people, compared with employment of non-autistic people.

2.3.3 The Value of Autistic Employees

However, research has demonstrated that many autistic individuals possess strengths and abilities that are valuable within the workplace (Baldwin et al., 2014; de Schipper et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2014), such as a high degree of accuracy in visual perception, concentration ability, and high tolerance for repetitive activities (Smith et al., 1998). Employers of autistic adults have reported that they add substantial value to their teams as they possess strengths and abilities which are beneficial within the workplace, rarely requiring retraining (Hagner & Cooney, 2005). In their study, Hagner

and Cooney used semi-structured interviews to gather the views of fourteen supervisors of employed autistic adults, ranging across industry sectors and job roles (including supermarket cashiers, hotel maintenance and library data-entry workers). They found the supervisors evaluated autistic employees highly, stating that providing tailored support for employees is a managerial responsibility, something they 'do for everybody'. Specific accommodations reported as beneficial for autistic employees were maintaining a consistent schedule and set of job responsibilities, using organizers to structure tasks, reducing unstructured time, and using direct and unambiguous language. It is important to note that although this does shed some light on potentially beneficial workplace adjustments for an autistic individual, the researchers did not gather the employees' own views of this, limiting conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Nevertheless, neurodiversity in the workplace (that is, employing people with conditions that mean they process input from the world differently; Mottron, 2011) evidently has been shown to be an advantage for businesses and companies who hire these individuals (Austin & Pisano, 2017). However, the high unemployment rates amongst the autistic population continue, which raises questions as to why this may be the case.

2.4 Employment and Models of Disability

A range of individual (including social communication difficulties or sensory issues) and environmental/social (stigma toward autism and employer views) barriers to employment have been identified within the literature for the autistic population (Baldwin et al., 2014; Hernandez & McDonald, 2010). However, the literature that explores barriers to employment from the perspectives of autistic YP is sparse. YP's views on these barriers, whose responsibility it is to overcome them, and therefore

what support is required and for whom, would likely differ dependent on the model of disability an individual adopts. A consideration of the literature relevant to this, including autistic YP's views on this topic, may therefore contribute to developing some understanding.

2.4.1 Understanding and Defining Disability

According to Barton (2009), the way in which the concept of disability is understood is important because this impacts the language used when referring to disabilities, influencing people's expectations and interactions with disabled people and the consequent nature of support that is provided. Over time, disability has been understood in a variety of ways (Fitzgerald, 2006; Haegele, 2016; LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2008). Defined by Rudnick (2017), disability 'can be characterised as a lack of ability to function according to personal and/or other norms' (p. 1). It is the *reason* for this difficulty functioning in line with others that is continually disputed, with evidence suggesting that views and perceptions of this differ dependent on the model of disability adopted by an individual.

Furthermore, Brittain (2004) claims that organisations and individuals who have the power or authority to establish definitions in society and are in command over the knowledge within a particular field, influence conceptualisations of disability. Brittain (2004) refers to these organisations and individuals as 'cognitive authority'. However, who is viewed as most appropriate to hold this cognitive authority also differs between models of disability. For example, current debates exist surrounding whether medical professionals, disabled individuals themselves, or both, should be leading

conceptualisations of disability and determining the nature of the support they receive (Fitzgerald, 2006).

2.4.2 The Medical Model

Within the Medical Model (MM) of disability, also known as the within-child deficit model, cognitive authority for disability discourse is held by doctors and scientists, who conceptualise disability as a biological product (Brittain, 2004). This model suggests that the limitations associated with having a disability are viewed as the product of the individuals' impairment, implying that something is inherently disabling about impairments (Blustein, 2012). The MM promotes 'fixing' these impairments and 'normalising' the individual to the greatest extent possible as the best path toward function and independence (Roush & Sharby, 2011).

Therefore, within the MM, autism is framed as an impairment within the individual that should be treated and normalised (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017). Fundamentally, this stance suggests that the way in which autistic people experience and interact with the world is inherently 'wrong' (Crane & Pellicano, 2020). This would suggest that the barriers to employment arise as a result of an autistic person's impairments, and that the responsibility of overcoming the barriers they may face in relation to this lies with the autistic person, by 'correcting' their behaviours or learning skills in line with non-autistic people (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017).

However, examination of the literature reveals that there is increasing interest in the degree to which the challenges autistic people are faced with arise from societal conceptions about, and stigma toward, autism among non-autistic people (Campbell

& Barger, 2014; Gray, 1993; Harrison et al., 2017; Mak & Kwok, 2010; Obeid et al., 2015). In the context of a world that is moving toward more inclusive practices (that is, a society where all individuals are enabled by society to participate and engage with what the world has to offer; Lambert & Frederickson, 2015), the MM is becoming increasingly criticised. For example, some claim the MM has no acknowledgement of the role of interpersonal interactions (DeJaegher, 2013) and societal factors (Kapp et al., 2013; Kenny et al., 2016) in contributing to the challenges experienced by autistic people (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017). Most importantly, many autistic people have voiced their concern with the way autism is conceptualised via the MM, reporting feelings of disempowerment resulting from this deficit-focused view, something they reportedly disagree with strongly (Milton & Bracher, 2013; Pellicano et al., 2014). This suggests that autistic YP do not feel the sole responsibility of overcoming such barriers to employment should lay with them.

2.4.3 The Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability (SMD) offers an alternative perspective to the MM and places the moral responsibility upon society to provide autistic individuals (and with other disabilities/impairments) with the resources required to overcome barriers that may be restricting their access to society, or remove them completely (Oliver, 2004). The SMD argues that individuals are only disabled within a non-inclusive environment (not by their impairments) and provides a lens through which to view the world to identify societal barriers for disabled individuals. It contests that it is society that imposes disability on individuals with impairments (Bingham et al., 2013; Brandon & Pritchard, 2011; Coles, 2001; Indjov, 2007; Palmer & Harvey, 2012).

An integral principle of the SMD is the clear distinction between the terms 'impairment' and 'disability'. Impairment is viewed as an abnormality of the body, such as restriction or malfunction of cognitive ability (Fornham, 2009; Goudley, 2001), whereas disability is perceived to be the disadvantage caused by societal factors where people with impairments are excluded from aspects of community life due to these impairments not being accounted for (Goodley, 2011). This separation of terms is important. It suggests that it is society that limits an individual's abilities and participation, not their bodily function (Barney, 2012; Roush & Sharby, 2011). Advocates of the SMD therefore argue that disability is imposed *in addition* to impairments, resulting in isolation and exclusion for these individuals (Bingham et al., 2013; Brandon & Pritchard, 2011). This model reflects the views of many disabled academics and advocates, acting as a catalyst where they can encompass the cognitive authority on disability discourse (Fitzgerald, 2006).

Unlike the MM, the SMD suggests that constructing solutions should not be directed at the individual but rather at society (Haegele, 2016). Improvement for individuals with impairments would therefore require political action and social change rather than change in their physical bodily skills and abilities (Bingham et al., 2013). The foundations of this model lay within the Equality Act (2010) which states that no individual should be discriminated against based on several 'protected characteristics', one of which is 'disability', and places responsibility on society to implement 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure everyone's equal access to society. This argument has high relevance to the issue of unemployment amongst the autistic population, as this model claims that autistic people only encounter barriers to employment as a result of a non-inclusive society. This suggests that their difficulties with, for example,

social communication and/or sensory needs, are only a barrier within a society that enables them to be barriers and does not account for such difficulties. In this case, emphasis on societal change and adaptation seem central to enabling autistic people to transition into employment without experiencing barriers to do so.

However, the SMD has attracted many criticisms, including the argument that the concept of a world in which people with impairments are free of environmental barriers is hard to operationalise (Shakespeare, 2017). There is also argument that the SMD neglects individual experience of impairment, risking implying that impairment is not a problem for individuals (Crow, 1992; French, 1993; Morris, 1991). Research is also beginning to emerge on autistic people's views of this model, which suggests that despite viewing autism as central to identity, autistic people did voice the importance of supports to help autistic people gain adaptive skills (Kapp et al., 2013). This indicates that autistic people adopt a more nuanced perspective on disability than what is offered by the SMD alone. These are important considerations when devising support for autistic YP's transition into employment that is in line with their views.

2.4.4 The Medical Model and Social Model of Disability – A False Dichotomy?
Barton (2009) identified that it seems common to view the MM and the SMD as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, suggesting that disability is either caused by health impairments or by social circumstance, but not by both together, nor by other factors. Rudnick (2017) claims this view represents a dichotomous approach to the distinction between the MM and the SMD, reporting that this dichotomy is false. He claims these two models are not mutually exclusive, as they can be complimentary, nor are they jointly exhaustive, as there are other factors causing disability, such as

non-health-related personal factors and environmental factors unrelated to social circumstances. Some argue that perspectives on disability should therefore move beyond the knowledge available within these two models (Fitzgerald, 2006), as neither of these models are sufficient alone (Shakespeare et al., 2017), and individual and personal experience should be considered (Marks, 1999). Although this currently seems unclear, this view may seem to be supported by autistic YP's views (relating to their criticisms and views on the shortcomings within the MM and SMD). This possibly provides some direction relating to what developments are required within disability discourse and conceptualisations, so that support can be developed in a way that is reflective of autistic people's views.

2.4.5 Alternative Perspective: The Biopsychosocial Model

According to the existing and most recent literature, the biopsychosocial model (Engel, 1977) is potentially most aligned with how autistic people view autism and the challenges they face, wherein internal differences interact with psychosocial factors to create the challenges associated with autism (Kapp, 2013). The biopsychosocial model can be applied to bring together biological, psychological and social factors in a more holistic account of disability (Waddell & Aylward, 2010). It may provide a framework for a multi-factorial account of disability, where there is acknowledgement of the biological, psychological, and social factors creating the challenges associated with disability (Shakespeare et al., 2017). Within this model, understanding barriers and making decisions about intervention and support becomes more about considering all three factors, and examining and adjusting the fit between the person and their environment than about solely 'fixing' an abnormality and/or focusing upon environmental changes alone (Doyle, 2020).

Consistent with this view, autistic scholar, Damian Milton, reframes the notion of autistic people's difficulties with social communication as a 'double empathy problem' (Milton, 2012). He proposes that while autistic people may struggle to understand the inner workings of non-autistic people, the reverse is also true, creating challenges. This notion has been supported by a range of empirical studies that have demonstrated how breakdowns in communication between autistic and non-autistic people result from mutual misunderstandings. For example, using an information transfer task and dividing participants in to three groups (autistic, non-autistic, and a combination of autistic and non-autistic people) of eight participants each, Crompton et al. (2020) explored the notion that miscommunication arises from a mismatch between neurotypes (for example, whether a person is autistic or non-autistic). The researchers found that the autistic group and the non-autistic group performed similarly in terms of how accurately they could communicate information. However, much less information was shared successfully between the participants in the mixed neurotype group, suggesting an issue with communication between people of different neurologies. The authors argue that this demonstrates the *mutual* challenges between autistic and non-autistic people, suggesting that there should be a shared responsibility for such issues and efforts on both sides to overcome this.

It is important to consider that some claim it can be challenging to identify the extent of the impact of the factors acknowledged within the biopsychosocial model, such as the impacts of impairment and environmental/societal barriers, in everyday life (Watson, 2003). This suggests that such issues may be more complex to overcome in practice than is suggested by the biopsychosocial model.

2.4.6 Implications for Supporting Autistic YP into Employment

Consideration of autistic people's views relating to models of disability may offer some insight into their thoughts about the support they feel is necessary to enable them to access employment opportunities. Research seems to indicate that both the MM and the SMD do not sufficiently reflect autistic YP's perceptions of how they conceptualise autism and the associated difficulties, yet there is some suggestion that the biopsychosocial model may address this. Although research is lacking in terms of autistic YP's views on the support they find helpful, and feel is required, to enable them to access employment opportunities, their views relating to the concepts within the biopsychosocial model are hugely relevant. It therefore feels important that this is considered in future research that explores autistic YP's views and experiences of accessing society in line with their non-autistic peers. This would enable examination of the support these YP feel is necessary to improve their employment opportunities and consequently the development of the support available for this population during this transition.

Consistent with their views, autistic YP therefore have reported they feel they would most benefit from support targeted at developing their communication skills (Iovannone et al., 2003) and learning other adaptive skills (Kapp et al., 2013). They also would like to receive tailored support from employers who are willing to develop their understanding of autism and implement appropriate adjustments (Hagner & Cooney, 2005), as well as more general employment supports (such as appropriate role-specific training and education) that would also be required by their typically developing peers (Schall et al., 2006; Gerhardt & Holmes, 2005; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004).

2.5 Supported Employment Programmes (SEPs)

SEPs refer to 'real work in an integrated setting with ongoing support provided by an agency' (Beyer et al, 1997, p. 3). These programmes provide individualised support, designed to increase participation in community work settings (Smith & Philippen, 1999), providing participants with on-site support from an allocated job coach (Stevens & Martin, 1999). SEPs could possibly provide packages of support in line with the biopsychosocial model; although they acknowledge that learning specific workplace skills are necessary for successful employment, they adopt a broader approach to supporting YP into employment as they can teach interpersonal skills (such as social and communication skills) as well as support employers to widen their understanding of SEN, including autism, and make appropriate adaptations (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009), therefore contributing to creating a more inclusive society. SEPs therefore focus on not only equipping YP with particular skills, but also on advocating for YP and supporting organisations to be more accommodating of difference (Richardson, 2019).

2.5.1 Background: The Supported Employment Model

The supported employment model was originally developed in the USA, and stems from the belief that anyone can be employed if they aspire to secure employment and if sufficient support is provided (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004). It is an evidence-based and personalised approach to supporting people with learning difficulties/disabilities into jobs (Melling et al., 2011), assuming that no individual or group should be considered 'unemployable' and that the workplace is the best place to learn employability skills and promote inclusion (O'Bryan et al., 2000). Further developed by the BASE, the supported employment model acknowledges and outlines the role of the employer as well as the employee, in improving employment outcomes for disabled individuals. See Figure 2 for a visual depiction of this model.

Figure 2. The Supported Employment Model (BASE, 2022)

2.5.2 SEP Example and Reported Benefits

Although exact figures for the number of SEPs within the UK could not be obtained at the time of this study, the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE, 2022; a national charity contributing to outlining and promoting good practice for supported employment services) state that many local authorities either fund or provide Supported Employment services. An example of a SEP using the supported employment model is Project SEARCH, founded in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1997 and active in the UK since 2010. A recent exploration of Project SEARCH within the UK identified 32 sites where this programme operates (Richardson, 2019). Designed for learning disabled individuals, it includes on-the-job support, a sampling of different work sites through regular rotation of work placements, classroom training to teach participants work-related and academic skills, and work with placement providers to advocate for the YP and advise on workplace adjustments and support (Rutkowski et al., 2006). An independent review of one Project SEARCH site within the UK found that 66% of

participants over three years were reported to have been offered paid employment upon completion of the programme (Richardson, 2019). Such SEPs have not only been associated with increased employment rates for many YP with a range of SEN (Nuehring & Sitlington, 2003), but with numerous other benefits, including improved social inclusion and quality of life (Belcher & Smith, 1994; Garcia-Villamisar & Hughes, 2007; Gates et al., 2002). Further positive benefits were found in a study by Beyer et al. (2016) who reports that employers expressed feeling more open minded about employing YP with learning disabilities/difficulties in the future since working with the SEP. This suggests that SEPs can contribute in a multifaceted way to improving YP's transitions to employment.

2.5.3 Qualitative Explorations of YP's Views and Experiences of SEPs

Although sparse, there is some research exploring YP's views and experiences of receiving support from a SEP beginning to emerge. A recent study, Romualdez et al. (2020) interviewed seven YP to explore the SEP model from the perspectives of its participants. The YP expressed that their participation in the SEP was a meaningful experience for them which promoted positive self-development and renewed ambitions for the future, facilitated by a strong support network within the SEP. The YP also identified some challenges to entering employment, such as social interaction/ communication difficulties and issues related to the relationship with their work placement managers, including lack of support and underestimation of their abilities. Although this offers some insight into the YP's views on this topic, it is important to note that the interviews conducted for this study lasted only 10-20 minutes each. This raises questions relating to the accommodations that were implemented to enable these YP to fully access and engage with the interview process in such a brief period

of time. In line with suggestions from many researchers and professionals (Cook & Hess, 2007; Priestley & Pipe, 1997; Wesson & Salmon, 2001), learning disabled individuals benefit from accommodations within research interviews, such as incorporated rapport building exercises, extra time for the YP to express their views and access breaks if they wish, and additional resources/prompts. It is argued that such accommodations can support these YP to express their views, and so the quality of information the researchers were able to gather during this short period of time (and the amount and quality of adaptations that were made) consequently seems unclear. Additionally, the seven YP interviewed were not all autistic, and had a range of learning or developmental conditions (including Down Syndrome and/or specific language impairment). This, along with the findings reflecting that of only one study, means that conclusions as to autistic YP's views remain limited and unclear.

2.5.4 Autism-Specific SEPs

The unique challenges autism can create for each autistic individual (due to the 'spectrum' nature of this diagnosis) requires specific, individualised support; the need for SEPs designed specifically for autistic YP beginning is to be recognised (Mawhood & Howlin, 1999). However, although the lack of such SEPs in the UK becomes apparent when exploring the literature (Howlin et al., 2000; Mawhood et al., 2000), those available seem to report high levels of success (Howlin et al., 2005). In their study, Mawhood and Howlin (1999) found that an autism-specific SEP resulted in significantly higher rates of employment amongst its clients than for a closely matched control group with access to only generic disability employment services. Only 25% of the latter group found employment, compared with 63% of the supported group. Although highlighting the benefits of autism-specific SEPs, this study only focused on

high-functioning autistic YP, excluding much of the autistic population. Furthermore, the study evaluated the programme based on employment rates, failing to explore the YP's views or experiences, offering no insight into their lived experiences of this type of support.

Going some way to addressing this gap, a study of an autism-specific SEP, Howlin et al. (2005) found that approximately 68% of the autistic participants (n=59) gained employment, with the majority securing permanent contracts. At 8-year follow up, they managed to trace 15 individuals who were working at the time of the original study, 13 of whom were still employed with the remaining two receiving further support from the employment programme. This study gathered information (though limited) regarding the YP's views of the SEP, finding almost all (58 of the 59 participants) reported the SEP had been helpful, and most (44 of the 50 participants) said they could not have managed without support of this nature. Although this study made some contribution to understanding the YP's views of an autism-specific SEP, the adoption of quantitative methods restricts the extent to which these YP can share their experiences. The study therefore does not provide any insight into why these YP found the SEP helpful or what particular support they valued in supporting their preparations for, and transitions into, employment. In line with the views of Scott et al. (2018), it therefore remains vital there is further research focusing on developing a better understanding of autistic YP's experiences of the support they receive by eliciting their views, constructing a more in-depth understanding of their lived experiences. Doing so with regard to autistic YP who are transitioning into employment and participating in a SEP can contribute to informing the future development of support for this

population, having significant implications for SEPs and those working to support this population.

2.5.5 Consideration of SEP Criticisms

Within the SEP literature, there is increasing recognition that it is the diagnosis, and not the YP's individual needs, that determines place eligibility. Therefore, there is growing acknowledgement that the MM remains an important factor in determining who can access such support (Haegele, 2016). This demonstrates that the MM and the opinion of medical professionals remains a central factor in determining access to resources and support for autistic YP (Humpage, 2007). Furthermore, SEPs have been criticised as further marginalising those with more complex needs in their selection bias of the most able learners with these diagnoses, often requiring a particular level of qualification and/or skills to be eligible (Hall & McGarrol, 2012), excluding much of the population of learning disabled YP. The authors are also critical of the existing literature around SEPs, identifying that much of this largely relates to interviews with policymakers and practitioners, with a narrow outcome focused approach. These are all important considerations, as autistic YP may not feel that SEPs are in fact operating in the most effective and inclusive way possible. It is therefore vital that this gap in the literature is filled, and the YP's voices and experiences are heard to support the development of their employment support further.

2.6 Research Exploring Autistic Peoples' Perceptions of their Support

According to Research Autism, very little research exists which involves autistic people reviewing the interventions they receive or contributing to the development of

interventions (NAS, 2017). It is argued that this can have an impact on the relevance and appropriateness of this support. In a study by McLaren (2014) autistic respondents to an online survey reported that interventions and support for autistic people are not well-aligned with their needs and interests because autistic people are rarely involved in designing and reviewing such interventions. Furthermore, interviews conducted with eleven autistic adults by Griffith et al. (2012) uncovered that participants felt their perceptions continued to be overlooked in favour of academic expertise. As stated by one participant in this study, 'everybody is an expert bar the person with a diagnosis. That needs to change' (p. 14). Many argue that this gap in the literature is restricting and limiting the development of support for the autistic population, as autistic people feel they can offer unique insights about autism, derived from their lived experiences of the condition, that are not being heard or utilised (Huws & Jones, 2015; Jones et al., 2013, 2015). The voice of these YP is therefore under-represented within the literature. As highlighted by Davidson (2008), it is possible this gap in the literature is due to some of the common stereotypes of autistic people as asocial, unemotional or uncommunicative in nature, but as argued by Brownlow and O'Dell (2006) this perception is denying a voice and must be addressed.

Furthermore, there has been growing recognition of the 'translational gap' between autism research and autism practice. According to Crane and Pellicano (2020), if autistic people are asked about the impact that research has had on their day-to-day lives, the answer tends to be 'not very much'. The 'A Future Made Together' project, conducted in the UK by Pellicano et al. (2013, 2014), reviewed autism research between 2001 and 2011 and found that over two thirds of this research focused on understanding the underlying causes and biology of autism, rather than interventions,

supports and services. When presenting these findings to over 1,600 members of the autism community (autistic people, family members and professionals) the researchers found that two thirds were dissatisfied with autism research focusing in these areas. They found that the autism community wanted research that could have more direct and practical relevance in their lives to be prioritised, that explores topics such as how autistic people can be best supported and how public services can meet the needs of autistic people. Such topics will therefore be prioritised for the purposes of this research, with consideration of how the YP's views can be applied in practice, in line with the views expressed by the autistic community.

2.7 National Context and UK Government Response to Post-16 Support Needs

2.7.1 CYP Voice and Person-Centred Support

The importance of gathering and considering the views of all CYP is not just an ideology, but also a reflection of developments in CYP's rights (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). The most recent updates within legislation, such as the Children and Families Act (Department for Education, 2014) and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department for Health, 2015), seeking the voice of CYP on matters that concern them is vital. These key pieces of legislation promote the use of person-centred approaches, an empowering philosophy shifting power from professionals to service-users, acknowledging the individuals' expertise in their own lives (White & Rae, 2015), with eliciting the CYP's voices as a key component.

A person-centred approach is therefore vital and relevant for all support for CYP with SEND, including autistic YP. The term 'person centred' is reported to have been

developed due to a shared belief that services tended to work in a service-centred way and that support services (that are set up to respond to issues relating to social exclusion, disempowerment and devaluation) can unintentionally contribute to it (Wilson, 2013). The person-centred approach (founded by the American Psychologist, Carl Rogers during the 1940s) is now seen as a vital component in supporting YP with SEN during their transitions to employment (Department for Education; DfE, 2022). Explaining the development of his person-centred approach, Rogers (1980) stated 'individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes are provided' (p. 115). The importance of the application of person-centred planning, as identified in the Children and Families Act (2014), therefore is defined as 'a process of learning how a person wants to live and then describing what needs to be done to help the person move toward that life' (Smull & Sanderson; 2005; p. 7). To be person-centred 'is to put the person in the middle of our thinking and get to know the person in fresh and vital ways that set the pattern for everything else we do in partnership with that person' (Mount, 2000, p. 26). Furthermore, as stated by Lown (2005) 'there are good moral, pragmatic and legally supported reasons for listening to [YP], if plans are to be successful for them' (p. 37). The recognition of the value of person-centred approaches within UK legislation is therefore welcomed by many (Chidley & Stringer, 2020), and should guide practice for support services and professionals (Richardson, 2019) as well as researchers (NAS, 2017) working with this population.

In line with this framework and legislation, autistic YP should therefore be provided with opportunities to share their views and experiences of the support they receive,

contributing to how this support is structured and delivered. Eliciting such information could facilitate future development of autism-specific SEPs for YP, ensuring accessibility and tailored support for this population, directly responsive to their lived experiences of such support, and inform how those around them (including professionals) offer support.

2.7.2 Education, Health and Care Plans and Preparing for Adulthood

Furthermore, the UK Government's White Paper 'Valuing Employment Now: Real Jobs for People with Learning Disabilities' (2009) acknowledged that YP with SEND, including autism, appear to have been left behind (Richardson, 2019) and that improvements are needed relating to the support available for these YP upon leaving school and throughout their transitions to employment. This resulted from several concerns that statutory services are generally failing to meet the needs of many YP upon leaving school (Howlin et al., 2005; Levine et al., 2004). Many argued that this lack of appropriate support undoubtedly contributes to the high unemployment rates amongst the autistic population (Kusi, 2017; Richards, 2012), having significant societal financial implications due to lost productivity and increased reliance on government funding (Järbrink et al., 2007; Krieger et al., 2012; Roux et al., 2013). The government has consequently recognised that continued support for post-16 YP with SEN is vital (Richardson, 2019).

The consequent introduction of The Children and Families Act (Department for Education, 2014) introduced EHCPs (replacing Statements of SEN), a legal document which sets out the education, healthcare and social care needs a CYP has and the support they require. Most notably, this led to an extension to the age range of YP who

could access statutory support from educational services, now up to 25 years old (compared with the previous 'Statements' ceasing at school-leaving age). Funded by the Department for Education, the consequent development of the Preparing for Adulthood (PfA; 2013) strategy promotes employment as a key outcome, alongside independent living, friends, relationships and community, and good health, in an attempt to address the support needs for YP as they transition to employment. It highlights five key elements for improving life chances for YP with SEND, including autism, developed upon a person-centred approach to supporting these YPs' transitions to employment:

1. Personalising approaches

2. Developing a shared vision

3. Improving options and support

4. Raising aspirations

5. Planning services together

Despite these developments being welcomed, it is argued that without appropriate support services and resources available to support these YP into employment, this transition remains challenging (Lorenz et al., 2016). Efforts to improve and develop the support available for these YP is therefore vital.

2.7.3 Government Guidance on Supported Internships

Recognising the evolving evidence-base of supported employment for many YP with SEN, the Department for Education (DfE; 2022) identified supported internships (a variation of supported employment) as a pathway to employment for these YP and issued guidance relating to the necessary components of such support. Identifying the

process of 'vocational profiling', a person-centred method to identify the career interests and aspirations of YP, the DfE (2022) promote that this process remains tailored to an individual and that they are supported in line with their aspirations. Furthermore, they outline four principles that supported internships in the UK need to abide by (see Figure 3), supporting the uniformed and evidence-based approach to supporting YP within the supported employment framework.

Figure 3. *The Four Principles of a Supported Internship (DfE, 2022)*

Principle 1	A significant majority of YP's time is spent at the employer's premises in a work placement. During work placements, YP will be expected to comply with real job conditions, such as timekeeping, shift patterns and dress code.
Principle 2	YP follow a personalised study curriculum, alongside time on work placements, including relevant aspects of English and maths. This will be a bespoke package (delivered by the provider), will support progression to paid employment, and give YP opportunities to reflect on their learning journey.
Principle 3	Job coaches are central to the study programme and provide support to both the YP and employer. They should be trained in line with the national occupational standards for supported employment.
Principle 4	The primary goal for YP is paid employment. Work placements must work for both the YP and employers. For YP, jobs must fit with their vocational profiles, contribute to their long-term career goals and be flexible to address barriers where necessary. For employers, they should meet a real business need. Employers should be committed to supporting YP towards paid employment.

Despite this guidance from the DfE, the issue remains that such supports have not yet been devised in a way that is responsive to YP's views and experiences of this support, further supporting the need for research in this area. It is therefore vital that we seek deeper understanding of what support these YP find helpful and why, thus developing

and advancing support available for this population, contributing to improving their employment outcomes.

2.8 The Developing Role of Educational Psychologists with Autistic Young People

The extension to the age range eligible to access education services and supports has been welcomed by many, and has meant EPs now have the opportunity to utilise their knowledge, skills and experience to support autistic YP once they have left school and during their transitions into employment. This extension to their role has been seen as an exciting and overdue development, with many recognising the highly specialised and valued support this profession can contribute to improving outcomes for this population (Atkinson et al., 2015) and the potential to contribute to enabling many more autistic YP to transition to employment successfully.

2.8.1 The Role of the EP

EPs play an integral role in promoting inclusion and equal opportunities for CYP with SEND, including autism. The role, originally defined by Cyril Burt (the first recorded EP) concerns itself with the welfare of 'the individual child and of the community as a whole, when all is said, it is nothing but an organisation of individual children [and YP] who have grown up' (Burt, 1964, p. 1). One of the distinctive and valuable contributions of the EP relates to their use of psychological problem-solving frameworks, which provide a holistic approach to solving complex problems across three different levels; individual, group, and organisational (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Cameron, 2006; Kelly et al., 2008; Woolfson et al., 2003). Within these three levels, it is recognised that EPs have five core functions; assessment, intervention, consultation, training, and

research (Scottish Executive, 2002). However, there seems to be a small research base that explores the role and contribution of EPs in post-compulsory educational practice (Morris & Atkinson, 2018), limiting the development of their practice in these areas. These are important considerations for this research, as in line with the findings from Crane and Pellicano's (2020) explorations, autistic people are calling for research that not only involves them but carefully considers how this understanding of their thoughts, views and experiences can be applied in practice and to the support they receive.

2.8.2 New Opportunities

The five core functions of an EP's role that can be applied across the three levels mean that an EP could be well placed to support autistic YP and the development of support/provision in an approach reflective of the biopsychosocial model. The EP could therefore be a very important resource (Cameron, 2006) and an integral component to improving employment outcomes for autistic YP.

Many suggest that although building links and working relationships with post-16 settings, local employers and adult services constitutes new territory for EPs, it is an area within which a significant contribution could be made (Bason, 2012; Knox, 2011). Through building links with community-based initiatives, employers and adult service providers, EPs and EPSs can "bridge the gap" between schools and post-school agencies (Currie & Goodall, 2009, p. 74) and offer support through multiagency working (Bason, 2012; Knox, 2011; MacKay & Hellier, 2009).

Therefore, EPs could support settings to understand the needs of autistic YP and make reasonable adjustments to facilitate their inclusion (Knox, 2011). EPs can help YP explore and consider their aspirations, utilising person-centred and solution-focused approaches and tools (such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope; PATH) to ensure paths are constructed that are in line with their views and hopes for the future, with the identification of practical and relevant supports. Adopting an advocacy role, EPs can encourage the meaningful inclusion of YP's views and wishes in transition practices and support these YP to communicate their views in person (Tyson, 2011). As suggested by Bason et al. (2012), this may be particularly valuable for autistic YP who may also experience difficulties relating to language and/or communication. They can also provide training to promote understanding of the needs of the autistic YP and facilitate the development of supportive provision and wider understanding and acceptance of YP with SEND (Bason, 2012; Esbrand, 2016; Geiger et al., 2015; Knox, 2011). Therefore, Geiger et al. (2015) claims that EPs are well placed and well suited to facilitate positive change for autistic YP during key transitions. However, research continues to lack relating to the EPs role in some of the more unique post-16 settings, such as SEPs.

2.8.3 New Challenges

Despite the opportunities this extension to the EPs role has created, it hasn't come without its challenges. The shift in policy has been referred to as 'one of the most significant developments the profession has ever experienced' (Atkinson et al., 2015, p. 3). As reported by Atkinson (2014), established applied psychology does not change significantly in the way its principles, practices and ethical constraints are applied as the client group grows older, but new professional perspectives, reflections,

sensitivities, and accommodations are required. Therefore, although EPs will continue practicing in accordance with relevant legislation (such as promoting inclusion and adopting person-centred approaches and tools), they now require additional knowledge and understanding regarding how to work with this new age group within a range of new settings (Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

Therefore, efforts to develop educational psychology practice with YP are welcomed (Atkinson et al., 2015). However, as EPs have begun this work, the extent to which these YPs' views and experiences are under-researched and under-reported within the literature is becoming increasingly highlighted (Apter et al., 2019), restricting EPs' ability to adapt their practice accordingly. As argued by Hendricks and Wehman (2009), a great deal more must be learnt to best support autistic YP and placing them at the centre of the process is pivotal. Exploring the views of autistic YP regarding the support they receive could contribute to constructing deeper understanding of this population's lived experiences at this key juncture in their lives, guiding EPs' future practice.

It is also important to consider the findings of a recent study by Payne (2020), who explored EP's post-16 work since this extension to their role. The researcher found that many EPs expressed having limited opportunities to support YP within the range of settings available for 18-25 year olds, within the context of the emerging traded models of service delivery for many EPSs (that is, settings choosing to commission EP support based on services offered by an EPS). The study reported that although EPs have witnessed a smooth transition to traded services for settings which EPSs have positive and established relationships with (such as primary/secondary schools

and colleges) EPSs have received much lower requests for support from the range of 'new' settings that they are now required to work with, such as employment programmes. The traded model places the SEP staff as the gatekeepers to educational psychology support for autistic YP. Therefore, if SEP staff are not requesting such support, this becomes a barrier to autistic YP accessing support from an EP, and the practical impact of any implications for EPs that are identified within research studies will be restricted. Payne (2020) concluded that further research that explores the EP role in a range of settings for post-16 YP would be beneficial in not only enabling EPs to develop their practice with this age-group, but also contribute to enabling more YP to access support from EPSs. Such considerations are important, as in response to the concerns of autistic YP regarding research having little direct effect on their lives and a request for research that explores how services can support autistic YP (Pellicano et al., 2013, 2014), it is vital that identified barriers to implementing any research findings are considered and addressed to ensure maximum impact of the research findings.

2.9 The Current Research Study

2.9.1 Overview of Rationale

To conclude, it is vital that future research uses qualitative methods to gather the views of autistic YP who participate in SEPs, to address the many identified gaps within the literature and enable these YP to contribute to the development of this support. However, it is also important to consider the barriers (and how to overcome these) to applying this new understanding in practice. Therefore, research that also explores the EP's role with this population (in response to these YP's views), as well as what

services EPs should be offering these settings in order to be invited to support these YP more broadly, would make a vital contribution.

2.9.2 Research Aims and Questions

This study aims to qualitatively explore autistic YP's views and experiences of transitioning into employment and the support they have received from a SEP. Guided by these views and experiences, and working in collaboration with SEP staff, this research will also consider the potential role for EPs in supporting these YP within such settings. This research hopes to shed light on the following four research questions:

1. What are autistic YP's views and experiences of the opportunities for, and barriers to, employment for the autistic population?
2. What support provided by an autism-specific SEP do autistic YP find helpful in supporting them into employment?
3. What additional support do autistic YP feel should be provided by an autism-specific SEP to better support them into employment?
4. How can EPs and EPSs support autistic YP within SEP settings?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including my epistemological position, the research design, participant information, materials, and the study procedure. Methods of analysis will also be detailed, followed by an outline of the ethical considerations and the techniques adopted to ensure trustworthiness. Within this section, my reflexivity will also be acknowledged.

3.1 Epistemology

The importance of researchers stating their epistemological position is well established within the literature. This provides clarity and transparency regarding the underlying assumptions and beliefs guiding the research (Hays & Wood, 2011). Throughout this study, I assumed a social constructionist standpoint, acknowledging that reality can be different for each person based on unique understandings and experiences of the world (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Social constructionism suggests that these understandings are constructed through social processes between us (such as language and interaction; Harper, 2011), and states that there are no objective truths. Acknowledging a subjective nature of truth, social constructionism recognises truth as being based upon multiple perspectives, and suggests existence of shared meanings (Burr, 2003). This notion lends itself well to exploring the views and experiences of autistic YP, particularly relevant due to the varied conceptualisations of autism and disability, as identified within the literature review.

When a social constructionist approach is used in research, the researcher adopts a stance of curiosity and seeks to explore the complexity of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014). By promoting curiosity in the research process and recognising research as a liberating experience, a social constructionist approach encourages the

researcher to acknowledge which data fits with their prior knowledge and which does not (Losantos et al., 2016). This approach is consistent with my role as a TEP, consisting of researcher and reflective practitioner responsibilities. Throughout this study, I acknowledged that experiences of employment opportunities/barriers and SEP support are constructed through the participants' subjective perceptions of their experiences, and that my interpretation of these experiences may be subject to certain influences (this notion will be considered further in the 'Reflexivity' section of this report).

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Qualitative Design

As this research endeavoured to answer research questions that lie within a qualitative paradigm, and consistent with my adoption of a social constructionist standpoint, a qualitative approach was applied throughout. This represented a good fit with the research aims (exploring the views and/or experiences of participants rather than searching for a single answer or quantifying participants' responses).

Qualitative methods allow investigation into people's subjective experiences, opinions and beliefs that cannot be measured statistically (Percy et al., 2015). This enables participants the freedom to explain their ideas and respond to questions in their own words (Barker et al., 2002), allowing a researcher to capture the voice of specific groups (Carroll & Rothe, 2010). This approach to research is recognised as encompassing valuable tools that can be used to explore and develop understanding of an individual's experience (Alderfer & Sood, 2016) and focuses upon the way in which people make sense of, and experience, the world around them (Willig, 2008). Therefore, qualitative explorations facilitate investigations into how people understand

their experiences, meanings, actions, interpretations and descriptions (Creswell, 2014), enabling a 'detailed exploration of the interwoven aspects of the topics or processes studied' (Yardley, 2000, p. 215). Adopting a qualitative approach to exploring this area therefore enabled a contribution to be made to the current gaps within the literature, identified within the literature review.

3.2.2 Two-Phase Design

Two phases of data collection were designed to address all four research questions.

3.2.2.1 Phase One: Semi-Structured Interviews

To answer research questions one, two and three, the first phase of this research consisted of semi-structured interviews with autistic YP. Through interviewing, a researcher can explore what cannot be directly observed, such as thoughts, feelings, intentions, and previous experiences (Patton, 2002). The perspectives of others are not only acknowledged as meaningful and knowable through interviewing, but are able to be made explicit (Smith, 2007). Semi-structured interviewing, a specific form of interviewing, was selected as a method of data collection for phase one due to the suitability of use with autistic participants, enabling in-depth conversations (Cridland et al., 2015), allowing flexibility to focus on issues that are meaningful to participants (Barbour, 2000) and minimising researcher control over participants' expressions of their experiences (Brewin et al., 2008). A one-to-one interview approach was selected for this phase of the research to enable participants' voices to be heard and valued individually.

3.2.2.2 Phase Two: Focus Group

To answer research question four, phase two consisted of a focus group with SEP staff. A focus group was identified as the most appropriate method of data collection for this phase. According to Barbour and Kitzinger (1998), focus groups can evoke honest and contextualised insight within a structured discussion that allows individuals to express their views in an open, friendly, and non-judgemental space, enabling the creation of valuable and thoughtful discussions. These discussions can enable practitioners to build a better understanding of the views of individuals within a specific context, and in the process effect change (Xerri, 2017), an important element to this research study.

To ensure the YP's views and experiences remained at the heart of both phases of data collection, the study design was created with this in mind. Analysis of phase one data (YP's views and experiences) was completed immediately after phase one data collection, so that the YP's views could be used to inform the focus group discussions in phase two. See Figure 4 below for a visual depiction of this design.

Figure 4. *Visual Depiction of the Two-Phase Study Design*
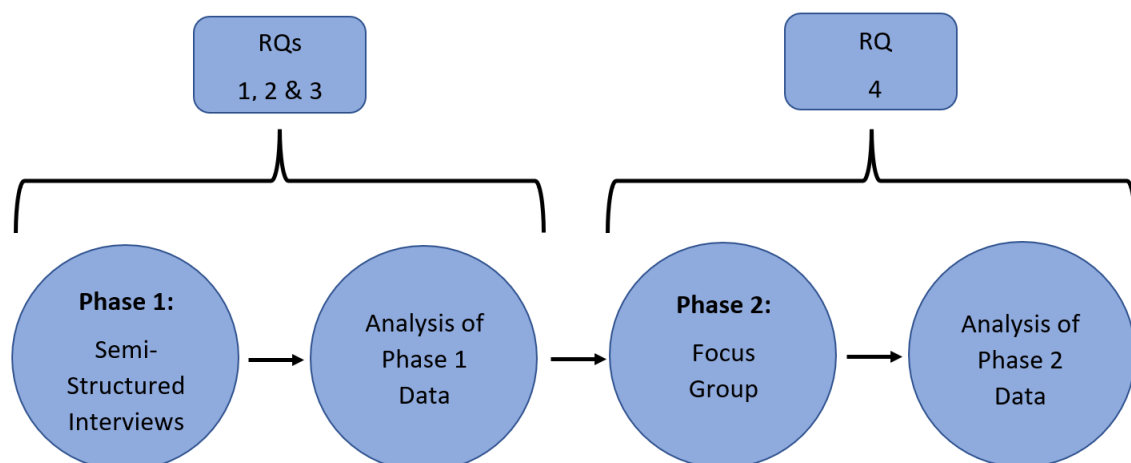
Note. 'RQ' is used to indicate the term 'Research Question'

3.3 Participants and Inclusion Criteria

Adopting a purposive sampling approach, all participants for both phases of this study were recruited from one autism-specific SEP, based within Central London. Eligible participants for phase one of this study were students within their final year of this SEP, who were within the ages of 18 and 25 years old. For phase two, eligible participants were members of the SEP staff team, who had been employed by the SEP for at least one year, and were either a member of the senior leadership team, teaching team, and/or hold the role of 'Job Coach'. This ensured that the participants had the required and relevant level of authority within the SEP and/or experience of working with the autistic YP to facilitate the most insightful discussion surrounding the potential EP role within SEP settings.

3.3.1 Supported Employment Programme Context

I was able to identify the SEP used for this study due to previous professional work experience, prior to beginning my role as a TEP. This SEP was developed based upon the guidelines set out within the supported employment model (BASE, 2022) and the supported internship principles (DfE, 2022). All YP eligible to participate in the SEP are required to have a diagnosis of autism and an EHCP. During the SEP, students attend carefully matched work placements 1-3 days each week, within a range of settings including National Health Service (NHS) hospitals (departments including portering, catering and administration), cafés/restaurants and supermarkets/retail, each placement lasting one term. All students are allocated a job coach, who provides support to students through placement visits once per week, with additional time allocated where required. The job coach to student ratio is approximately 1:5. Students also attend an 'Employability Skills' class one day each week (learning skills related to communication within the workplace and professional appearance) as well as

'Functional Skills' classes to develop their maths and English skills if required. In the second year of the programme, students also attend a 'Job Club' one day each week (guiding students through job applications, CV writing and developing/practicing interview skills). The SEP regularly organise social events and trips (such as bowling or meals in restaurants) for students to increase access to opportunities for socialisation amongst their peers. SEP staff also provide guidance and training for placement providers relating to autism and the implementation of appropriate reasonable adjustments.

At the time of this study, 26 students were enrolled on the SEP, distributed across two academic year groups. There were 13 students on the SEP who met the inclusion criteria for phase one participation. The SEP also consisted of 17 staff members employed by the SEP, 14 of whom were eligible to participate in phase two of this study. See Figure 5 for a visual overview of this.

Figure 5. *Visual Overview of Inclusion Criteria and Participants*
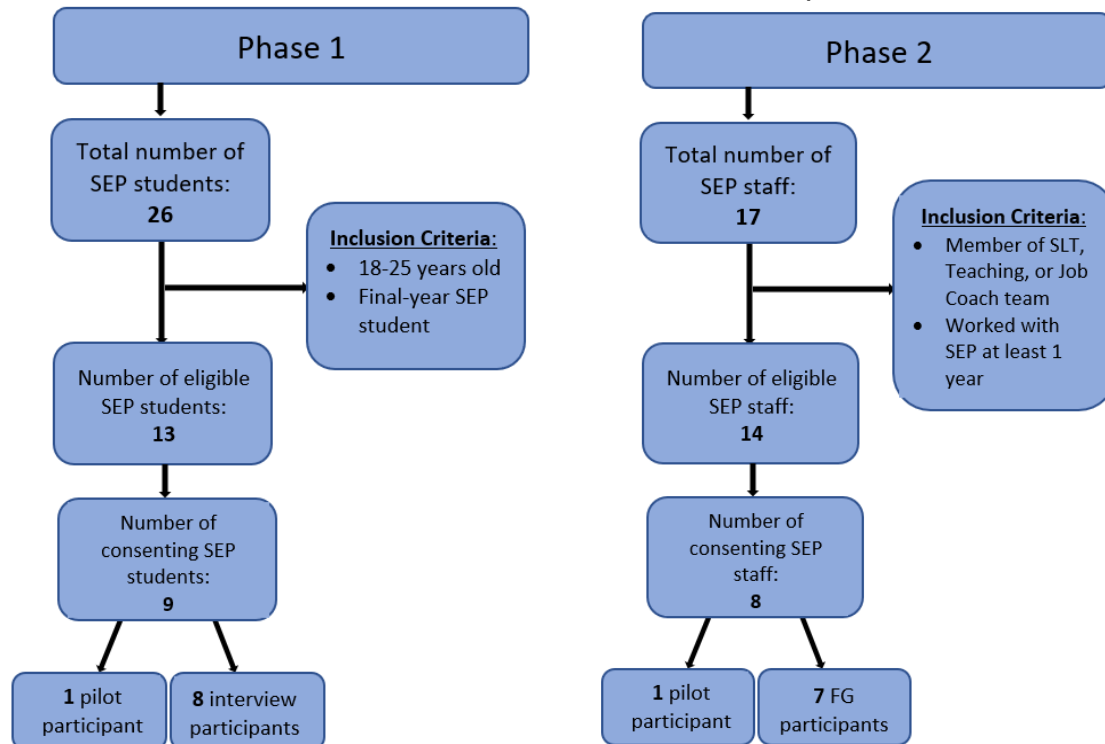
Note. 'FG' is used to indicate the term 'Focus Group', and 'SLT' for 'Senior Leadership Team'

When contacted, the identified SEP stated that they had not worked with an EP before and had little knowledge of the EP's role.

3.3.2 Participant Recruitment

Once this setting had been identified, I contacted the SEP via the SEP manager. Participants were then informed of the study and subsequently recruited with the assistance of the SEP manager, who distributed the relevant study materials (such as information sheets and consent forms). Eligible participants who expressed interest and returned the consent form were included in this study.

3.3.3 Phase One Participants (Semi-Structured Interviews, Research Questions 1-3)
The participants for phase one of this research study consisted of 8 SEP students who met the phase one inclusion criteria. Addressing one of the limitations to the study by Mawhood and Howlin (1999), participants in this study had diagnoses of autism reflecting varied positions of the spectrum and held various levels of highest qualification (see Table 1 below), which is more representative of the autistic population (Harvery et al., 2021). The male-to-female ratio of the participants in this study was 5:3. Although this figure is not consistent with one of the most recent estimates within the literature regarding the overall male-to-female ratio of the autistic population (of 3:1), it is reflective of the ratio within the SEP. Therefore, it may be more representative of the true higher figures relating to the prevalence of diagnosis between males and females in the adult autistic population, as highlighted in the 'literature review' section of this report (see Loomes et al., 2017). See Table 1 for further information relating to these participant details.

Table 1. *Phase One Participant Details*

Participant	Gender	Age (Years)	Diagnosis	Highest Level of Qualification
1	Female	20	ASD	Level 2
2	Male	23	Asperger's	Level 1
3	Male	23	ASD	Level 2
4	Male	23	ASD	Level 2
5	Male	25	ASD	Level 3
6	Female	24	ASD	Level 2
7	Female	25	ASD	Entry Level 3
8	Male	25	ASD	Level 2

Note. Participant numbers allocated in this table are not consistent with participant numbers allocated for the interview transcriptions. See Appendix B for further information relating to specific qualifications for each qualification level.

3.3.4 Phase Two Participants (Focus Group, Research Question 4)

Phase two of this research study consisted of 7 SEP staff members, who all met the inclusion criteria for this study phase. See Table 2 for further details relating to participant information for phase two of this study.

Table 2. *Phase Two Participant Details*

Participant	Gender	Job Role	Years with SEP
1	Female	SEP Manager	6
2	Female	Functional Skills Tutor	2
3	Male	Head of Education	2
4	Female	Job Coach	1
5	Female	Employability Skills Tutor	3
6	Female	Senior Job Coach and Careers Lead	4
7	Male	Job Coach	1

Note. Participant numbers allocated in this table are not consistent with participant numbers allocated within the focus group transcriptions.

3.4 Materials

Methods to obtain informed and voluntary consent, and the materials required for this, were carefully considered throughout this study, a necessary component of all research (Agre & Rapkin, 2003). Firstly, an information sheet (see Appendix C) and informed consent form (see Appendix D) were created and distributed to the SEP manager, in order to seek her informed consent for the research to be conducted with SEP students and staff.

3.4.1 Phase One Materials

Materials for phase one were created in an accessible format, to support the autistic YP in engaging with this study, in line with the recommendations of many researchers and professionals (such as Walmsley, 2001; further details on this can be found in the 'Ethical Considerations' section of this report).

An accessible information sheet (see Appendix E) and informed consent form (see Appendix F) were created for use during participant recruitment. An interview schedule was constructed, consisting of 10 questions (including 'How has your autism affected you finding/keeping a job?' and 'If someone was thinking about joining [SEP], what would you say to them?'. Each question was accompanied by several supportive prompts, utilising clear and accessible language (such as 'Can you tell me more about that?' and 'Why do you think that?'. This interview schedule was constructed in two versions; one for the researcher (see Appendix G), and one for the participants (see Appendix H). The participant interview schedule reflected a more visual version of the document (incorporating larger font, pictures, symbols, rating scales and sentence starters), as providing a concrete basis for questioning and a shared point of reference can result in a more effective communicative exchange between interviewer and autistic interviewee (Barrow & Hannah, 2012; Cook & Hess, 2007; Lewis & Porter, 2004; Priestley & Pipe, 1997; Wesson & Salmon, 2001). There are also suggestions that these adjustments can result in a more enjoyable experience for the YP (Mauthner, 1997), and enable researchers to explore deeper insights into the YP's world (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

The SEP Manager was consulted throughout the process of developing the phase one participant materials, such as the information sheets, consent forms, and the interview schedule. This enabled me to seek and receive feedback on these materials, particularly relating to their accessibility and suitability for this population. Materials were amended in line with the SEP Manager's suggestions, such as using a larger font in some areas, and removing some images to achieve a balance between the schedule being visual and not over-stimulating.

The SEP Manager was also consulted when methods/platforms for the interviews were being considered. In line with the SEP Manager's views, interviews were conducted using a particular online video communication platform, which the students had become familiar with using during the SEP.

3.4.2 Phase Two Materials

An information sheet and informed consent form were created for phase two of this study (see Appendix I and J respectively). Thorough, comprehensive and accessible information regarding the parameters of the EP role (see Appendix K) was identified and used as material for a pre-reading activity, prior to participants' attendance at the focus group. This was to ensure that participants had an understanding of the EP role and the services offered by an EPS prior to their attendance at the focus group. A focus group schedule was constructed (see Appendix L). This schedule consisted of three main sections, as outlined below:

1. A brief overview/recap of the EPs role (including their training/qualifications, the services they offer and to who). Time was allocated for questions following this. This section of the focus group was incorporated to ensure participants had a good understanding of the EP role, in preparation for the focus group discussion.

2. Feedback of phase one themes.

3. Focus group discussion.

The focus group discussion schedule consisted of initial questions to prompt reflection on the themes arising from phase one, such as 'What themes/subthemes are consistent with your thoughts on what the autistic YP think, feel and experience?' and

'Were there any themes/subthemes that surprised you?'. Questions to directly explore the EP's role, included 'Bearing in mind the themes, I'd like to hear your thoughts on how you think an EP could support within [SEP]/SEPs?' and 'What other services could EPs offer in order to appeal to [SEP]/SEPs?'. Prompts and follow-up questions were also incorporated into the focus group discussion schedule to aid this discussion, including 'can you tell us more about that?' and 'Does anyone have a different thought?'.

3.4.3 Piloting

Pilots were used for both phases of data collection in this study, contributing to the development of materials. The significance of conducting pilots is well established within the literature (Cridland et al., 2015; Merriam, 2015). Pilots can be employed to trial interview/focus group schedules and to address potential practical issues within the research procedures (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Castillo-Montoya (2016) found that study materials, and procedures around their use, can be strengthened through piloting. They can assist the researcher in identifying if there are flaws or limitations within the materials' design, and allow opportunities to make necessary modifications (Kvale, 2007). Pilots are therefore recognised as a key component of my formulation of fit-for-purpose interview/focus group schedules, providing an opportunity for reflection on the use of materials, as well as to practice the necessary skills and finalise procedures, in accordance with feedback from participants (Majid et al., 2017).

Pilots for the materials for both phase one and phase two of this research were conducted with an individual who met the inclusion criteria for the relevant phase. The

pilot participants (one for each phase) were chosen at random from the pool of respondents, using an online random number generator, to ensure impartiality and fairness. It is suggested that pilot participants should share as similar criteria as possible to the group of participants for the main study (Hennik et al., 2011). Therefore, although using eligible participants for the pilots reduced the amount of data gathered for this study, this was viewed as a valuable approach in developing the quality of materials and procedures, contributing to the overall efficacy and richness of the data gathered in this study, and was therefore viewed as a good 'investment' of a participant contribution.

3.4.3.1 Pilot: Phase One

Conducting a pilot interview with an autistic YP (who met the inclusion criteria) for phase one is also in line with suggestions made by Crane and Pellicano (2020), who state that autistic people should be enabled to contribute to the research processes involved in autism research, potentially as a consultant. As a result of this pilot, adaptations were made to some materials in line with the pilot participant's feedback. For example, some of the language used was adjusted (replacing the term 'false' with 'not true') and a question number 'tracker' was designed and added to the participant interview schedule (on each question slide of the PowerPoint), to inform participants of the current and remaining question numbers.

3.4.3.2 Pilot: Phase Two

A pilot of the focus group schedule was conducted with a member of staff from the SEP (who met the inclusion criteria). This pilot resulted in adjustments being made to the focus group materials, in response to the pilot participant's feedback. For example,

slight changes were made to the participant focus group schedule (to be presented as a PowerPoint to participants during the focus group). Although phase one themes were fed back to the group at the beginning of the focus group, visual depictions of these themes were added to each of the discussion question slides. Consistent with the pilot participant's suggestions, this provided a point of reference for focus group participants, supporting them to refer to, and respond in line with, these themes when contributing to the discussion and ensuring the YP's views remained at the heart of the discussion.

3.5 Procedure

3.5.1 Phase One Procedure

Participants were provided with the participant interview schedule 24 hours in advance. This enabled participants to access the document prior to the interview if they wished. This is in line with recommendations from Cridland et al. (2015), who suggest that prewarning YP with autism and providing additional preparation/thinking time can help to reduce anxiety. During the interviews, participants were initially thanked for declaring their interest in the study and reminded of their right to withdraw at any time. Participants were reminded they could have a trusted adult with them and request breaks during the interview. At the end of the interviews, participants were offered the opportunity to ask questions and thanked for their participation. Information regarding next steps of the research was provided at this stage and participants were reminded that they could contact me via email at any point.

3.5.2 Phase Two Procedure

Participants were provided with an electronic link to a particular website page and asked to read the information prior to attending the focus group, to ensure they have some knowledge of the scope of the role of the EP and the services generally offered by EPSs prior to attending the focus group. Upon attendance to the focus group, participants were thanked for declaring their interest in the study and reminded of their right to withdraw at any time. Once participants were provided with the information relating to the EP role and phase one themes, they were informed that this information should guide the discussions regarding the potential EP role within SEP settings. Following this discussion (led by the focus group schedule), time was allocated for participants to ask questions/voice any concerns, and for me to thank participants for their participation. I then provided information regarding the next steps of the research and participants were reminded of my contact details if they wished to get in contact.

3.6 Analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA), a method used for 'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6), was used to guide the analytical framework of this research throughout. Although some claim that TA assumes researchers have a sense of what they are looking for prior to the analysis (Crawford et al., 2008), this approach is widely recognised as providing flexibility, enabling the research to be driven by the accounts of participants, not tied to any theoretical standpoint, and offers compatibility with various epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These benefits relating to flexibility seem particularly relevant in light of Yardley's (2000) suggestions that researchers often become overly pre-occupied with specific analysis (applying rules and procedures so

firmly that they risk losing a critical stance) in an effort to enhance rigour. Furthermore, TA is viewed as a valuable method to use when investigating under-researched areas and when the views of a population are unknown, seeking to understand meanings that individuals assign to their social reality (Schutz, 1962). Furthermore, Lawrence (2012) claims that TA has the flexibility to enable the researcher to identify constructs. For these reasons, TA was identified as an appropriate method of data analysis in this study.

Consistent with the research questions and aims, an inductive approach (or bottom-up method) to analysis was adopted for this research. This means I allowed the data to determine themes, without being driven by any theoretical interest or analytical preconceptions. This results in the themes identified being strongly linked to the data (Patton, 1990). In accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestions, the following six stages were adhered to when conducting the analyses:

1. Become familiar with the data: The interview and focus group recordings were listened-to and transcribed verbatim, including fillers and non-verbal communication. Each transcript was read twice, and I made note of any initial ideas that arose during this activity to assist with identifying commonalities across the data sets.

2. Generate initial codes: Transcripts were coded. The flexibility of TA in practice meant that I had the flexibility to shift between both semantic (descriptive) and latent (interpretative) coding during this data analysis stage. An extract of one of the YPs' transcripts (phase one), and of the focus group (phase two),

demonstrating the generation and application of initial codes, are located in Appendix M and N respectively.

3. Search for themes: Codes were considered together at this stage which resulted in the merging of some codes. Codes with similar meanings were combined and renamed appropriately to create the first level of subthemes. Over-arching themes were then formed, resulting from patterns that emerged across participants.

4. Reviewing themes: Thematic maps of the analyses were produced at this stage, which represented the sub-themes and over-arching themes that emerged from the data sets. These themes were then considered alongside the initial impressions noted in stage one (see above), before being fed back to participants. Feeding back to participants provided the opportunity to explore participants' views on the themes, ensuring I had interpreted views and experiences correctly and that the themes were representative of participants' thoughts, views and experiences. Although amendments were not required following this, necessary re-analysis or adjustments would have been completed at this stage. See the 'Member-Checking' section of this report below for further information relating to this stage of analysis.

5. Defining and naming themes: As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), 'punchy' and/or interesting yet meaningful theme names were developed for the readers' benefit. Thematic maps were finalised at this stage.

6. Producing the report: The findings were presented in accordance with the research questions and were applied within the context of the current literature within the discussion section of the report.

It is important to note that the analysis was not a linear process, and adopted a recursive approach, particularly during the first three steps.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Data protection considerations were explored with submission of the research ethical approval form to University College London's (UCL's) Data Protection Team, who advised on any amendments. Once finalised, ethical approval for this research was sought and granted by the Research Ethics Committee at the UCL Institute of Education (see Appendix O). This study was identified as having a low risk of any ethical issues.

3.7.1 Informed Consent

Obtaining informed and voluntary consent is a vital component of all research that is conducted ethically (Agre & Rapkin, 2003). The information sheets and informed consent forms designed for the autistic YP utilised condensed language, pictures and symbols, in line with Walmsley's (2001) guidance. This ensured that YP who agreed to participate did so knowingly, with an understanding of the research purpose and requirements (Lewis & Porter, 2004). As an additional measure, drafts of these documents were sent to the SEP manager for her suggestions, before the participant information sheets were finalised, ready to be distributed to eligible students to invite them to participate. As suggested by the SEP manager, parental consent for the autistic participants in phase one of this study was also sought via an information sheet (see Appendix P) and informed consent form (see Appendix Q). It was agreed that decisions/next steps around participation for interested YP without parental consent would be made on a case-by-case basis, collaboratively between myself and the SEP

manager. However, such discussions were not required as all YP who expressed interest in participating received support to do so from their parent(s) through signed informed consent forms.

3.7.2 Participants' Comfort and Anonymity

There was careful consideration of the approaches and techniques required to ensure participants' comfort before, during and after the interviews/focus group. For example, an online platform that participants were familiar with was used for both phases of this study. The interviews of phase one of this research study also incorporated an icebreaker activity in order to build rapport between the participant and researcher. Furthermore, the autistic YP who participated in this study had access to a chosen trusted adult during the interviews (such as a job coach or parent being available in the next room or available via the phone; whichever was chosen by the participant), and were given the option of allocating someone to attend the interview with them if they wished. I also made arrangements to ensure the YP's job coaches were available via phone before, during and after the interviews if they were required by the YP. The autistic participants were also informed of the option to request breaks during their interview, with an agreed method for the YP doing this being identified at the beginning of each interview, such as asking verbally or holding up a specific object. Following each interview/the focus group, all participants were also debriefed, invited to ask any questions they may have, and encouraged to contact me with any concerns/questions following this.

 I ensured anonymity and confidentiality throughout both phases of this research by storing interview/focus group recordings on a password protected device and

removing any reference to names/locations within transcripts. An additional measure to ensure anonymity of participants between the interview/focus group was implemented during the write up of this report, by allocating different participant numbers when reporting participant details in the methodology section and when quoting participants in the findings section. This ensured that quoted participants could not be identified through any link to their individual information, such as age, diagnoses, or highest level of qualification (YP), and job role or length of employment (SEP staff).

3.8 Trustworthiness

Literature suggests that the term 'trustworthiness' is more appropriate for use within qualitative research, in place of the terms 'validity' and 'reliability', often used within quantitative research (Cypress, 2017; Rolfe, 2006). The trustworthiness of qualitative research is therefore as significant as the validity and reliability of quantitative research (Yardley, 2000). Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Pilot & Beck, 2014). It is therefore vital that qualitative researchers incorporate methods to increase trustworthiness throughout the research process (Connelly, 2016).

3.8.1 Member-Checking

Member-checking, also known as participant validation, is a technique used to explore the credibility of study results, a crucial element in increasing the level of trustworthiness within a qualitative study (Birt et al., 2016). It involves actively involving participants in checking and confirming the results of an analysis, and can be done by the researcher feeding back analysis results to participants and seeking their views.

This method is a powerful tool in validating, verifying and assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative results (Doyle, 2007).

Member-checking was used for both phases of this study. Once analysis of data had been completed, themes and subthemes were fed back to participants, and their views on these themes were gathered. This additional measure enabled me to explore if the themes generated were reflective and representative of participant's views and that I had interpreted their thoughts accurately. Consistent with Birt et al.'s (2016) suggestion that analysed data needs to be presented in accessible ways to participants, careful consideration was given as to how this information could be communicated with participants.

All participants were contacted via email, and an accessible document containing a simplified overview of themes and subthemes (with examples of anonymised quotes for each subtheme from a range of participants) was attached. Participants were invited to share their feedback via an email response, and offered an online meeting/phone call if they preferred. Although feedback was encouraged, it was made clear that this was not compulsory for participation in the study. Feedback on themes was overwhelmingly positive for both phases of this research, and no amendments to themes were required. Participants expressed feeling happy with the themes and subthemes extracted, reporting that they were reflective of their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

3.8.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, defined as the researcher's self-evaluation throughout the research process (Berger, 2015), is viewed as central when conducting qualitative research to

contribute to establishing trustworthiness (Lazard & McAvoy, 2017). It not only increases the creditability of the findings and trustworthiness of a study (Berger, 2015) but also deepens our understanding of the work (Dodgson, 2019).

According to Edge (2011), reflexivity comprises of two interacting elements; prospective and retrospective reflexivity. Prospective reflexivity refers to an awareness of the effect of the whole-person-researcher on the research, whilst retrospective reflexivity concerns itself with an awareness of the effect of the research on the researcher. Both will be considered within this section.

3.8.2.1 Prospective Reflexivity

My prospective reflexivity was evident through selection of the research topic. Owing to my experience working with autistic YP, prior to and during my time as a TEP, I have developed an interest in how these individuals perceive and experience their world. By supporting autistic YP throughout their secondary education and transitions into employment, I have been exposed to witnessing the challenges these YP face during this time. I therefore have developed my own perceptions regarding these YP's experiences and the support they may benefit from, and acknowledge this may impact my interpretations and analysis. I have also become aware of the challenges EPs face in adapting their practice to working with autistic YP, such as the limited relevant literature and reduced opportunities for work within these settings, throughout my experience as a TEP. Keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process enabled me to identify and reflect on my own perceptions, ensuring the authenticity of the participant's voices remain at the heart of this research.

3.8.2.1.1 Reflexive Journaling

Reflexive journals are often used by researchers with the aim of improving the reliability of research and removing researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). They have been described as an important factor in enhancing ethical and methodologic rigour (Smith, 1999). Although many papers and textbooks provide examples of research journals (for example, Silverman, 2013), few detail what they should consist of and how to keep them. A framework for reflexive journal keeping, outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1982), has been regularly used by researchers, and recently branded as 'one of the few good published' set of guidelines by Turner (2020). The authors define reflexive journaling as 'the major means for an inquirer to perform a running check on the biases, which he carried with him into the context'. For this present study, I applied this framework to reflexive journaling in order to reduce researcher bias and interpret the data as objectively as possible. In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1982) guidelines, this consisted of the following four entry considerations:

1. A log of evolving perceptions

2. A log of day-to-day procedures

3. A log of methodological decision points

4. A log of day-to-day personal introspections

3.8.2.2 Retrospective Reflexivity

Regarding retrospective reflexivity, the process of undertaking a literature review and proposing methodology to address some of the gaps within the research has enabled me to develop my own practice when eliciting YPs' views, a key aspect within my current role as a TEP. For example, the information regarding how to adapt resources and language to ensure accessibility for this population has enabled me to adapt my practice in direct response to this, developing my knowledge and skills relevant to

ensuring my communication methods are accessible for this population. My retrospective reflexivity will be considered further within the discussion section of this report.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this section, I will outline the research findings from both phase one and phase two of this research. Four themes emerged following analysis of phase one data, and one theme from phase two data, each with multiple associated subthemes (see Table 3 and 4 respectively). Theme definitions will be provided, and subthemes will be elaborated upon with reference to participant quotes. A comprehensive thematic map, presenting all themes and subthemes extracted from both phases in this research, can be found in Appendix R.

4.1 Findings from a Thematic Analysis of Phase One Data (YP Interviews)

Table 3 presents an overview of the themes and subthemes that emerged following a thematic analysis of the phase one data.

Table 3. *Themes and Subthemes from Phase One Data*

Themes	Subthemes
1. Conceptualising Autism: The Combination and Interaction of Individual and Environmental Factors	• Positive and Unique Skills and Qualities • Cognitive and Language Skill Difficulties • Social Awareness and Communication Difficulties • Sensory Needs • Difficulties Understanding, Communicating and Regulating Emotions • Others' Level of Autism Awareness and Understanding • The Role of Appropriate and Relevant Support • Stereotyping and Discrimination
2. Autism Identities: Juxtaposed Feelings	• Ownership and Pride • Low Confidence and Self-Esteem • Feeling Stigmatized and Rejected • Feelings of Loneliness and Isolation • Uncertainties around Future
3. The Value of Practical and Applied Learning Alongside Understanding, Acceptance, Adjustments and Advocacy	• Practical and Applied Learning Opportunities • SEP Community of Acceptance and Understanding of Autism • Advocacy, Adjustments and Widening Autism Awareness • Building 'Employability' – Qualifications and Experience • Building Connections and Developing Relationships • Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing Improvements
4. Hopes for Increased Independence, Understanding, Acceptance and Support	• More Application of Person-Centred Approaches • Further Social Support • Expanding Knowledge of Legal Rights and Available Support • Self-Advocacy Skills and Platforms • Increasing Independence and Life Skills • SEPs More Widely Available and Accessible • Wider Autism Understanding and Acceptance

4.1.1 Theme One: Conceptualising Autism: The Combination and Interaction of Individual and Environmental Factors

This theme illustrates the way in which the YP seemed to conceptualise, understand, and explain their autism as encompassing a range of both individual and environmental factors that combine and interact to influence the challenges and/or opportunities they experience. See Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. *Visual Depiction of Theme 1: Conceptualising Autism: The Combination and Interaction of Individual and Environmental Factors*

The Role of Appropriate and Relevant Support

Positive and Unique Skills and Qualities

Cognitive and Language skill Difficulties

Theme 1 Conceptualising Autism: The Combination and Interaction of Individual and Environmental Factors

Stereotyping and Discrimination

Others' Level of Autism Awareness and Understanding

Difficulties Understanding, Communicating and Regulating Emotions

Social Awareness and Communication Difficulties

Sensory Needs

4.1.1.1   Subtheme: Positive and Unique Skills and Qualities

Many YP associated autism with some positive and unique skills and qualities that they hold, enabling them to contribute to a team/task in a positive way. For example, some expressed feeling able to see things differently to others:

> *'I can see things quite differently to others… I am good at that because I'm autistic' (Participant 8).*

> *'We can see things in a different way… and I think we can… think about things in a way that other people who don't have autism don't (Participant 2).*

'I think a lot differently… it's a good thing… I try to think outside the box and like ways of getting around issues' (Participant 7).

Others described skills and qualities relating to creativity as something they associate positively with being autistic:

'Autism means I am a very creative person' (Participant 4).

'I would definitely say creative' (Participant 1).

'I do think autistic people are creative… we can imagine things differently' (Participant 2).

Participant 2 explained that these qualities mean he/she can contribute ideas that others may have not thought of:

'Give like better ideas of things that other people maybe wouldn't… think of' (Participant 2).

For participant 7, he/she feels this means he/she can contribute something different to a team:

'I can help get over an issue that other people may not have been able to' (Participant 7).

For others, being autistic is associated with positive skills such as interest and determination to develop skills and knowledge in particular areas:

'I have strengths in a few topics or fields I'm good at… like for me it would be ICT and maths because I like it and I have been determined to work at this and get better (Participant 3).

'If there is a specific subject um… whatever they are interested in they will always put their effort in…they will always be passionate about it and work hard to get better (Participant 5).

'I had a strong interest in trains… I knew so much about it because I spent so much time looking into it' (Participant 8)

Many recognised the value that these skills can have within a workplace:

'It means we can do things others can't at work' (Participant 5).

'Other people will like what we can do' (Participant 8).

4.1.1.2   Subtheme: Cognitive and Language Skill Difficulties

Many of the YP associated autism with some individual difficulties relating to their cognitive and language skills. For example, some YP expressed experiencing difficulties relating to processing information:

> *'It's a learning difficulty that affects how people process information in the world… it's… it's harder for us to do… may not process information properly' (Participant 4).*

> *'When there is a lot of information it can be quite overwhelming for us… and I have to uh… process one at a time' (Participant 5)*

Memory was also identified as something these YP experience difficulties relating to:

> *'I thought I remember it but then… I realise it can be easy to forget for me um… so I kind of have to really think about it so I can remember it (Participant 5).*

> *'I forget things all the time' (Participant 7).*

> *'With autism you forget things and don't remember stuff' (Participant 6).*

Some YP expressed experiencing difficulties relating to their expressive, and understanding of, language:

> *'We struggle with understanding things as well… um… like what people say so… daily things are just more challenging for us… I mean… like… a lot of people use quite like big words and language that I don't understand… and sometimes we don't really know how to word things or how to say something or how to answer a question' (Participant 2).*

> *'I don't always know what people are saying' (Participant 4).*

> *'To understand what someone is saying sometimes is hard… a lot actually… (Participant 5).*

Some YP described this as something that can negatively impact their job opportunities:

> *'It means getting and job and also keeping a job can be hard like if someone wants you to do something and you can't understand or don't know what they mean or something… you don't know how to do it (Participant 5).*

4.1.1.3 Subtheme: Social Awareness and Communication Difficulties

All YP expressed experiencing difficulties relating to the development of their social awareness and communication skills. For example, some expressed having to think much harder about what to say and how to act in social situations:

> *'We struggle in the way we communicate and interact with people… things are just more challenging for us because I think life is about being social… we don't know how to act or what to say' (Participant 2).*

> *'If I'm in a social situation…I keep quiet and I observe… the surroundings and I work out the correct things to say to someone… not to offend anyone… I have to think much more about that because I've had to learn (Participant 8).*

Ohers identified that understanding body language can be difficult for an autistic person:

> *'You have to read their expressions… their body language to see what they're like but um… with autism… its someone… who struggles to know how to do stuff like that' (Participant 5).*

Some YP reflected on how this has an impact on their ability to build friendships with others:

> *'It means we don't always have people as friends' (Participant 5).*

> *'Makes it hard to make friends' (Participant 2).*

Others reflected on the impact of these difficulties within the job application process and when in work:

> *'In interviews and stuff it's so hard to know how to act and what to say and also to know what people might be thinking of you' (Participant 7).*

> *'To like become part of the team can be hard because we don't always know what to say so may just be quiet' (Participant 2).*

4.1.1.4 Subtheme: Sensory Needs

All YP expressed experiencing difficulties relating to their ability to manage sensory stimuli, having an impact on their lives, including employment. For example, crowds, busy places and high noise levels can feel difficult to manage:

'I don't like crowds and that… it makes me feel overwhelmed… there's too much people… I'll avoid it so won't do stuff like going out somewhere' (Participant 6)

'Crowds and noises are difficult' (Participant 4).

'The environment and the noise… it just makes it like harder to… be able to cope' (Participant 2).

Participant 2 and 7 reflected on the impact these difficulties can have within the workplace:

'Once I worked in a coffee shop… and… it was just too busy…noisy... I really couldn't cope… so had to stop' (Participant 2).

'When I was a waitress for a bit that was hard… it was too noisy and too much going on like lots of people and that (Participant 7).

4.1.1.5 Subtheme: Difficulties Understanding, Communicating and Regulating Emotions

Many of the YP associated autism with having difficulties relating to their ability to understand, communicate and regulate their emotions and feelings. For example, understanding different emotions was identified as a challenge:

'We might not understand how we really feel' (Participant 5).

'It's hard to know exactly how you feel all the time' (Participant 7).

Many of the YP also expressed having difficulty explaining how they feel to others:

'Being able to tell people what you feel… yeah… and why' (Participant 7).

'We might not be able to express how we feel to other people' (Participant 5).

Managing and regulating emotions can also be challenging:

'I get quite a lot of like sleepless nights before going out… to work or wherever… which then makes me… quite… panicky in the morning' (Participant 2).

'Well autism… is that sometimes I get overwhelmed and feel stressed' (Participant 4).

Considering the impact on employment opportunities, some YP expressed this difficulty as having an impact:

'It can mean you don't feel able to do things… because it can make you feel nervous… if you can't explain to people how you feel… what would you do at work when you feel stressed?' (Participant 2).

'It can hold you back' (Participant 7).

4.1.1.6 Subtheme: Others' Level of Autism Awareness and Understanding

It was apparent that part of the YP's conceptualisations of autism related to the level of awareness and understanding that others have of autism, as they expressed this to have a significant impact on their lives as an autistic person. Some expressed feeling that autism is not widely understood and that this has an impact on their lives:

'People don't really understand what autism is… how autism works or… what it means to have autism or… aware of how it effects people… that's a big thing' (Participant 7).

'When most people think of autism they don't really know it… and know how to… react to it… makes it more difficult for us' (Participant 3).

'They don't know how to handle it… it makes things so much harder' (Participant 3).

Some participants spoke of the direct effect this has had on their employment experiences:

'It can become quite tricky… which has led me to leave jobs before... it just doesn't work out' (Participant 2).

However, many YP expressed that when they are around others who do understand autism, this has a positive impact on their experiences as an autistic person:

'Then they know how to approach us and what they can do to help so that makes things so much like…smoother' (Participant 7).

'Oh God yeah so much easier when you're with someone who knows autism… like breathing fresh air really (Participant 8).

4.1.1.7 Subtheme: The Role of Appropriate and Relevant Support

The YP explained that their experiences and opportunities as an autistic person is largely impacted by the level of appropriate and relevant support they have access to:

'It really depends a lot on if people help you… if people help then it makes it easier… but not everyone will do that' (Participant 7).

'It is important that we have help from other people because… as an autistic person… my life is very different with support' (Participant 8).

Some YP reflected on times of their lives when they felt support was particularly important and had influence on their experiences as an autistic person, such as during school to support their learning to enable them to gain qualifications for their futures:

'I didn't get the support I needed at school and so school was hard… I didn't get the qualifications that I wanted' (Participant 2).

Participant 8 considered the impact of not getting this support on employment opportunities:

'That's the main element on a CV for one example… to put your qualifications… so if you couldn't do them then what will employer's think when they see it? They will think you can't do the job' (Participant 8).

Some YP also considered how access to appropriate and relevant support around key transition times, such as when considering employment options, has an impact on their experience as an autistic person:

'I felt stuck… they don't help you with that at school… you have to work it out for yourself… so I was stuck in the middle like what work environment should I go in to… it was a stressful time' (Participant 5).

Many of the YP considered the importance of support for autistic YP's experiences of the job application process:

'Applying for jobs… knowing where to look and what to write and stuff… this is hard on my own' (Participant 4).

'Going to interviews and stuff and like… having to answer questions… we need extra help or we just find it so much harder to get a job' (Participant 7).

Maintaining employment without support is also reported as challenging for autistic YP:

'Keeping it can be quite hard as well because autism can make things difficult… you need… people to support you… otherwise you have to give up' (Participant 7).

4.1.1.8 Subtheme: Stereotyping and Discrimination

All of the YP considered experiences of autistic people being stereotyped and discriminated against, expressing this to be part of their experience as an autistic person and a key factor determining their employment opportunities.

The YP reported autistic people as being stereotyped as not wanting to socialise and interact with others, expressing that this is untrue:

> *'That we don't want to socialise and… don't want to talk or communicate… but that's so wrong… it's just a bit more difficult' (Participant 1).*

> *'It's what people think of us… because were autistic… they don't understand we just find it harder' (Participant 6).*

Other stereotypes related to an autistic person's inability to feel empathy, something the YP expressed as untrue:

> *'I think a lot of people think of autistic people as um… they don't have empathy… when I don't think that's the case at all' (Participant 2).*

Many YP also reported that autistic people can often be thought of people who 'can't do things', expressing that this has an impact on their opportunities:

> *'When a lot of other people think of autism they think of people that can't do things so won't… give us a chance' (Participant 1).*

> *'I think people think autistic people won't be able to do so… they don't try with us' (Participant 8).*

Many YP shared experiences of where they felt they had been discriminated against, as a result of their autism, when applying for jobs:

> *'Employers… they wont give a person a chance… because they look at this one specific title or word… autistic people… and straight away its just like… pushing away' (Participant 5)*

> *'[we] have a few more hurdles…. Like whether employers will be accepting… some might discriminate and may not hire someone because of it… it's happened to me' (Participant 4).*

> *'On my application I didn't disclose that I had autism... and I found it strange that I got that job... all the other jobs I had applied for I had said about autism and I never got those jobs'. (Participant 1)*

Participant one added:

> *'Having autism shouldn't mean that you are different from anyone else… you shouldn't be treated differently. But it's sort of a group that… isn't given as much of an opportunity so we can't live life like other people' (Participant 1).*

4.1.2 Theme Two: Autism Identities: Juxtaposed Feelings

This theme presents the YP's self-perception of their autism identities and the conflicting views they hold regarding this, both positive and negative, and the impact this can have on employment opportunities. See Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. *Visual Depiction of Theme 2: Autism Identities: Juxtaposed Feelings*
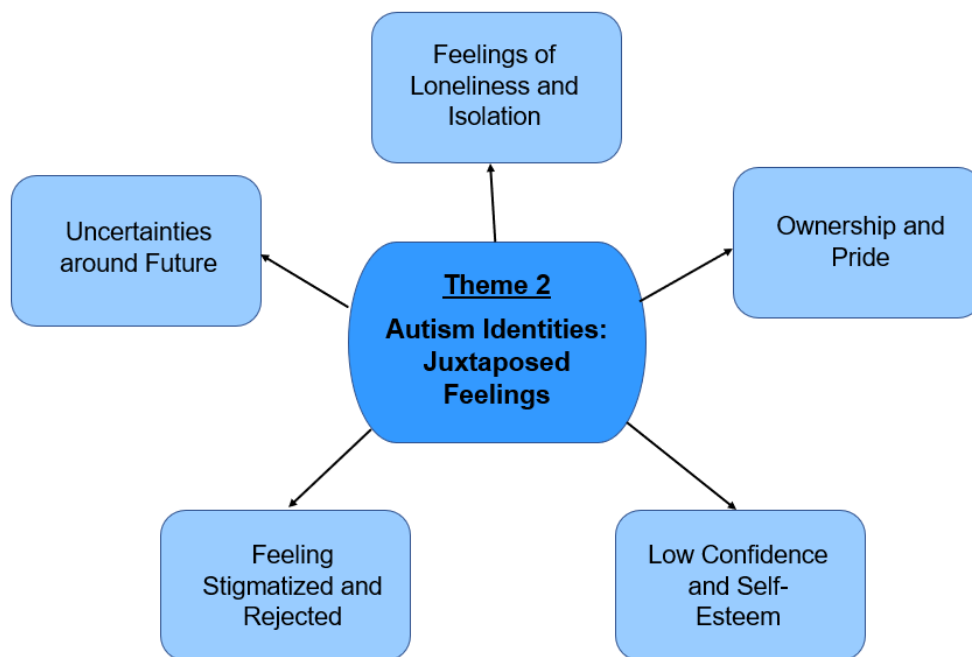
4.1.2.1   Subtheme: Ownership and Pride

Many of the YP expressed positive feelings related to being autistic, sharing a sense of ownership and pride of this:

> *'Autism is a true gift for anyone to have… we have a lot to offer everyone and we should not hide… we should be proud… I am' (Participant 8).*

> *'I'm like… I am an autistic person… that's me' (Participant 3).*

For some YP, this sense of ownership and pride was associated with the positive and unique skills and qualities they identified:

> *'I am proud that I am autistic… because I have things I can do because of it'* (Participant 7).

> *'I am proud because of the things I can do as an autistic person' (Participant 5).*

For Participant 6, having autism was a positive part of their identity that they would not change:

> *'If I had the option to not [be autistic]… I just wouldn't because… it is part of me'* (Participant 6).

4.1.2.2 Subtheme: Low Confidence and Self-Esteem

In contradiction to this, all YP also presented with, and expressed, low confidence and self-esteem in relation to their self-perception and identity as an autistic person.

Many YP expressed comments reflecting low confidence and self-esteem, associating this with the difficulties they face as an autistic person:

> *'Because I'm autistic… and because I need help with stuff… you don't always feel great about yourself… I always think I can't do stuff and that does feel rubbish' (Participant 5).*

> *'It means I'm not a confident person… I sometimes think there's so many things I'm not good at' (Participant 2).*

For Participant 2, this is associated with feeling that he/she would be unable to do certain jobs and considered the impact of this on finding a job:

> *'You might look at a job description and think oh… I don't think I'll be able to cope with that.. I won't be able to do that… and I think that about a lot of jobs… it kind of like limits your options' (Participant 2).*

Participant 6 expressed that their low confidence and self-esteem is associated with making comparisons with non-autistic people:

> *'I feel autism is why I need… adjustments but obviously… people without autism don't… and can do stuff' (Participant 6).*

Participant 2 expressed how these feelings are also largely impacted by environmental barriers autistic people face:

> *'There's only so many times you can put yourself out there before you just… start to think you can't do it and it's because of you' (Participant 2).*

It is evident that low confidence and self-esteem as an autistic person has a direct impact on the YP's willingness and motivation to apply for jobs:

> *'I thought I wasn't going to get it anyway… so I didn't apply' (Participant 1).*

> *'I didn't feel confident in myself that I would get a job… I was trying for ages… it does make you think you just can't do it… I didn't feel confident in myself that I would get a job… I felt like I would get turned down' (Participant 6).*

4.1.2.3   Subtheme: Feeling Stigmatized and Rejected

This subtheme reflects the YP's experiences of feeling stigmatised and rejected, contributing to a negative feelings towards their identities as an autistic person. Some of the YP expressed feeling stigmatised when in groups or around others:

> *'If you are the only one with autism… they would probably look at me differently' (Participant 6).*

> *'I feel like I'm quite looked down on… some people just like avoid talking to you… it kind of makes you feel… not very nice' (Participant 2).*

For many of the YP, this caused feelings of rejection which causes negative feelings about being autistic:

> *'Makes you feel… rejected… and not want to have autism sometimes' (Participant 2).*

> *'Rejected and because I have autism isn't it' (Participant 5).*

> *'Would it be better if I didn't have autism?' (Participant 7).*

Many of the YP spoke about being 'rejected' when making job applications as contributing to this:

> *'When you don't get a job… you're… you get rejected' (Participant 5).*

As a result of these issues, many YP expressed not wanting to declare their autism on their application form:

'If I don't put that on there then that might not happen' (Participant 5).

'I might not put it on the next one' (Participant 7)

4.1.2.4   Subtheme: Feelings of Loneliness and Isolation

Many of the YP expressed feeling lonely and isolated, something they associated with being an autistic person and causing them to feel negatively about having autism:

'Being autistic… it can be quite lonely' (Participant 2).

Expanding on this, Participant 2 and 6 shared that they felt this feeling was associated with relatedness and feeling 'different':

'Because sometimes we can't relate to everyone and not everyone understands us' (Participant 2).

'I don't know just… I always feel different from… normal people without autism… I always feel different from them' (Participant 6).

Some YP shared that their feelings of loneliness and isolation were associated with their difficulties communicating their emotions and not having others to ask for support:

'Some people don't have anyone to talk to… or might not understand their feelings like what they feel... so what happens is that person can feel kind of isolated' (Participant 5).

Others expressed that the difficulties they express with the social aspects of life result in feelings of loneliness and isolation, due to not having meaningful friendships:

'Not really being able to make friends and not having a lot of friends is hard as well... especially because… when your family have friends and stuff like that it becomes a bit of a... "oh I don't really have anyone" and you feel alone… being autistic is being alone a lot of the time' (Participant 2).

4.1.2.5 Subtheme: Uncertainties Around Future

Many of the YP expressed feelings of uncertainty about their futures, something they associate with the impact of the difficulties they experience as an autistic person:

'It does make you think about the future and what you'll be able to do… like getting a job and stuff' (Participant 3).

'I do think about like… what if I don't get a job… what will I do for the rest of my life?' (Participant 7).

'Where do I see myself in the next ten years… I had no idea… It's not nice feeling like that… everyone else seems to know… people who don't have autism… so you can feel a bit lost' (Participant 8).

Participant 3 and 7 expressed that this can cause negative feelings towards being autistic:

'Makes you feel… bad about it' (Participant 3).

'I can think sometimes that this would be easier to get to where I want to be if I didn't have autism' (Participant 7).

4.1.3 Theme Three: The Value of Practical and Applied Support Alongside Understanding, Acceptance, Adjustments and Advocacy

This theme encapsulates the value the YP place in being provided with opportunities for practical and applied learning and support, alongside understanding, acceptance, adjustments and advocacy from others. See Figure 8 below.

Figure 8. *Visual Depiction of Theme 3: The Value of Practical and Applied Support Alongside Understanding, Acceptance, Adjustments and Advocacy*
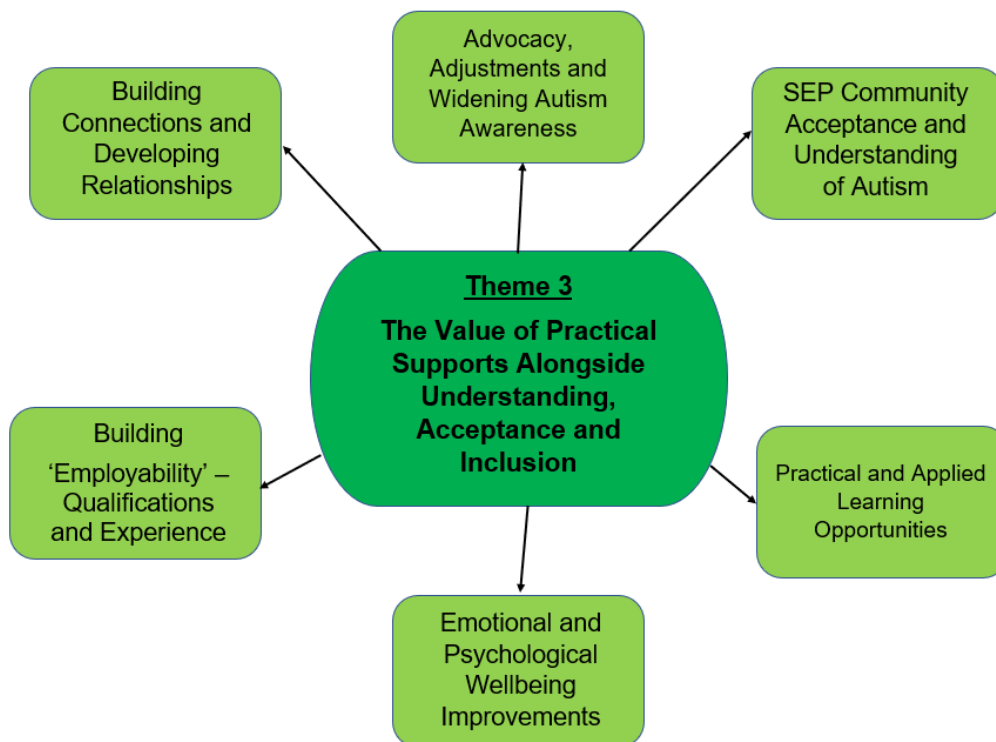
4.1.3.1 Subtheme: Practical and Applied Learning Opportunities

All of the YP placed high value in the support they have access to on the SEP, emphasising it is the practical and applied elements of this support that they value and find most helpful. For example, YP referred to the practical and applied learning they experience through work placements, job coach support, application and interview support, social opportunities, and travel training. Each of these will be expanded upon within this subtheme.

The YP expressed that the work placements provided opportunities to experience a particular career/industry, something they expressed as an important way to learn about a specific role/industry and decide what job they may want in the future, rather than being 'told' about it:

> *'The work placements are really helpful… I worked in the hospital… I worked in different retail as well… now I know what that's like'* (Participant 6)

> *'I get to experience… what work is like… in a working environment in a shop and not just tell me about it or imagine it'* (Participant 3).

> *'Gave me an inside on what that sort of job is like'* (Participant 1).

> *'Now I understand what job I can go for and what I want to do because I tried them'* (Participant 5).

The YP also valued the work placements as opportunities to learn and develop skills

whilst 'on the job':

> *'Otherwise I wouldn't know how to… behave and handle myself in a work environment'* (Participant 3)

> *'It helped me to learn those skills on the job and learn more about the skills for retail jobs… using the tills and talking to customers and sorting stock'* (Participant 6).

The YP also valued the work placements as being opportunities to demonstrate to

employers that they can fulfil a job role, sometimes resulting in job offers:

> *'I was good at it and learnt it all so [the employer] saw that they liked me'* (Participant 6).

> *'They can see what you can do'* (Participant 1)

> *'They offered [student] a job because he was so good… and [student]'* (Participant 5).

The YP identified the job coach support as valuable in providing practical and applied

guidance, support and direction for the development of their skills:

> *'[Job coach] is helpful… they set targets and it's... helped me see what I needed to do to help me more in the job* (Participant 1).

> *'[Job Coach] helped me out drastically… she comes every Friday and helps me learn the skills at work'* (Participant 3)

> *'You'll meet them and… get to do a progress report and what's going well… you can see what's happening and what you need to improve on'* (Participant 7).

> *'They talk to you about what you might need help with and show you… like talking to customers and what to say… and help you to know what to say so you can get better' (Participant 6).*

The YP also expressed value in the practical support available with the job application process (including job searching, completing applications, cv writing, interview practice and support):

> *'Has helped me with applying for jobs… I wouldn't have even known where to look' (Participant 1).*

> *'Writing CVs and like… applying… doing the forms and that… it is too hard when you don't know what you're doing… don't know if I would be where I am today without them doing that with me' (Participant 8).*

> *'Practice interviews… pretend ones… to try them out and practice' (Participant 2).*

> *'Obviously interview questions… getting confident in… like being in interview… and knowing how to act from practicing and pretending' (Participant 6).*

> *'They can come with you for interviews too and that's… that's really good… to reword things and repeat things' (Participant 5).*

The YP also recognised value in the travel training provided by SEP staff, providing practical and applied learning opportunities in this area:

> *'Travel training was really important… to be able to find out an alternative route from 'a' to 'b' from where I am to my work place… whether that's for an interview or my first day at work' (Participant 8).*

> *'You need to be able to do that to get a job and people usually don't have the time to help you with that' (Participant 7).*

> *'You definitely have to be confident in travelling on your own… and learning how to travel on the bus…especially if it's packed with people' (Participant 6).*

The social events and opportunities for discussion organised by the SEP were also valued highly for providing opportunities to practice and develop numerous social skills:

> *'Every morning we do a catch up session… where we have to talk about our weekend or something… so I feel that has really helped us to communicate with one another' (Participant 2).*

'It was a great chance for me to communicate with other students… and practice my social skills with other people' (Participant 5).

Participant 5 reflected on these thoughts and the progress he/she feels he/she has made as are result of these opportunities:

'I think that really helped because before then… I was a bit shy and didn't talk to people much… I could see some great progress made' (Participant 5).

4.1.3.2 Subtheme: SEP Community of Acceptance and Understanding of Autism

All of the YP identified that they feel a sense of acceptance and understanding within the SEP environment, something they expressed as important and valuable to them:

'You are just accepted and you know no one's going to judge you… you can be yourself and… they're fine about it' (Participant 2).

'It's important that everyone just understands you… they accept you' (Participant 8)

Many of the YP associated this with the SEP staff's understanding of autism, expressing that this is an important component of enabling feelings of acceptance and understanding:

'[SEP staff[do know about autism so they can understand you quite well… they get you… they understand' (Participant 7).

'They just all know about [autism] so that's important so they understand you' (Participant 1)

The YP shared that this understanding means that others then know how to support them. For example, during classroom teaching and work placements:

'It's a different way of teaching… it was just so much more of a smoother… like... ride… and I just found it more helpful' (Participant 2).

'When you're in the workplace and [job coaches] just know what [support] you might need… because they know autism' (Participant 5)

4.1.3.3 Subtheme: Advocacy, Adjustments and Widening Autism Awareness

All YP expressed value in the support from SEP staff in relation to advocation, adjustments and the widening of autism awareness.

They shared that they find it helpful when SEP staff explain to employers how they can help the YP, and what support they can implement:

> *'My job coach showed them how to help me… and spoke to [employer] when I needed her to' (Participant 8).*

> *They tell [employer] what they can do to help me and speak up for me' (Participant 7).*

> *'They speak for you what is… good' (Participant 1)*

Participant 7 explained the type of adjustments that he/she found helpful to support cognitive and language difficulties:

> *'Breaking stuff down into steps so you understand…so it's not all given at once… giving you a bit longer to do things and explaining things clearly and like… having things modelled' (Participant 7).*

Many also spoke about the value of the autism training that the SEP provide for employers who provide the work placements, as building others' understanding of how to support these YP and implement adjustments:

> *'They do autism training as well in the different bits of [hospital] if you do a placement there… so [employer/team] know more about it and can help you… that's really good as we don't get that if we got the job ourselves' (Participant 2)*

> *'When they've done [training] they know more about autism… and how to help us (Participant 4).*

Participant 3 reflected on how she thinks employers develop more awareness of autism through working with a program like a SEP:

> *'If the employer hadn't worked with [SEP] and what it does… for the community and for… autistic people… then they would be thinking … how do I handle this person in the workplace… what should I do with um… if something goes wrong' (Participant 3).*

4.1.3.4 Subtheme: Building 'Employability' – Qualifications and Experience

The YP valued the chance to build their 'employability'; an opportunity to gain qualifications and work experience that they could add to their CV/applications, demonstrating to potential employers they had the relevant qualifications and experience for a particular role and hopefully gain an interview.

Access to functional skills classes to work toward maths and English qualifications were valued:

> *You can get your qualifications for… either level one or level two maths… that is so important so we get the chance so we can put that on our CV… and then we can apply for jobs' (Participant 3).*

> *'The functional skills classes… to help me on my maths and English… it helped like gain more qualifications… because then I… have what I need for the application and get an interview' (Participant 7)*

> *'In every single job environment you need English and maths… I just know that I needed that to get a job… every time I would search for a job it would always come up… English and maths qualifications… so I would need it… it is mandatory' (Participant 5).*

Building up a CV of work experience was also valued due to demonstrating to potential employers they have relevant experience that may make them seem appealing as an applicant:

> *'I got a work placement in retail… when I applied for retail jobs I could put that on my application and then [employers] will know I have the work experience and want me' (Participant 6)*

> *'Getting that experience at [hospital] and putting that on my CV felt good… [employers] would know I've done it before so can get the job' (Participant 1).*

4.1.3.5 Subtheme: Building Connections and Developing Relationships

The YP expressed value in the opportunity the SEP provides to build connections with others and develop relationships.

Many reported that the SEP is a place to meet 'like-minded' people who they can relate

to:

> *'I also got to meet people in… similar situations to me because… everyone who is at [SEP] will have… similar reasons… and problems' (Participant 3).*

> *'To be connected with like-minded people… students like myself' (Participant 8).*

Many of the YP reported this has enabled them to make friends:

> *'Make friends… important things to me' (Participant 2).*

> *'I got to know other people there very quickly and made friends' (Participant 3).*

4.1.3.6 Subtheme Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing Improvements

The YP expressed experiencing many emotional wellbeing improvements, associated

with participating and receiving support from the SEP.

This included increases to confidence:

> *'I feel more confident now… [SEP Staff] showed me not to give up… pushing and encouraging me… telling me I can do it… I know I can now' (Participant 6).*

> *'I have so much confidence in myself then how I was… where I was very shy… I didn't want to socialise too much of the time…Honestly… I am so much more confident in myself' (Participant 8).*

> *'My confidence has grown so much over the last few years at [SEP]' (Participant 1).*

> *'It has boosted my confidence a lot' (Participant 3).*

> *'It's made me so much more confident and… I wasn't the person I am now when I started… so… yeah… I'm very grateful to them' (Participant 2).*

Participation in the SEP also seemed to enable the YP to develop their sense of

independence:

> *'I feel more independent yeah… able to do things on my own' (Participant 5).*

> *'I just really wanted to feel independent … it has helped so much with that' (Participant 2).*

The YP also described the SEP as an opportunity to succeed at something, resulting in a sense of achievement:

> *'A chance to see if I could succeed at something… it helps you remember what you can achieve' (Participant 5).*

> *'I've achieved things that I didn't even expect to do myself even… I finished this whole two year course myself… I didn't predict myself to go through this whole journey… I did it and that feels great it really does' (Participant 8)*

Many of the YP also reported having more optimism about the future and feeling a sense of future direction:

> *'[SEP] has helped me out quite a lot in a positive way… for my future life' (Participant 3)*

> *'If I didn't do [SEP] I wouldn't be the person I am today… I would be still not knowing what I wanted to do… and look where I am today… now… I know what I want to do for the future and I feel like a much better person for it' (Participant 8).*

Expanding on this, Participant 8 added:

> *'I still can't process the information in my head that I have my first paid job… which I didn't predict myself to get in the first place… I have to be frank with that… and… I said to myself … it's all thanks to all of the staff at [SEP]… if it wasn't for [SEP]… I wouldn't have been able to find myself where I am now really… I am beyond grateful I am lost for words… honestly… I have a future' (Participant 8).*

The YP also expressed finding and feeling a sense of belonging:

> *'To find that I just… just belong somewhere' (Participant 2)*

> *'It kind of made me feel that I would belong there with others so that's nice' (Participant 7).*

4.1.4 Theme Four: Hopes for Increased Independence, Understanding, Acceptance and Support

This theme highlights the YP's hopes for their futures, including what additional support the YP would like to receive, within and outside of the SEP, and what societal changes they would like to see, to improve their employment outcomes. See Figure 9 below.

Figure 9. *Visual Depiction of Theme 4: Hopes for Increased Independence, Understanding, Acceptance and Support*
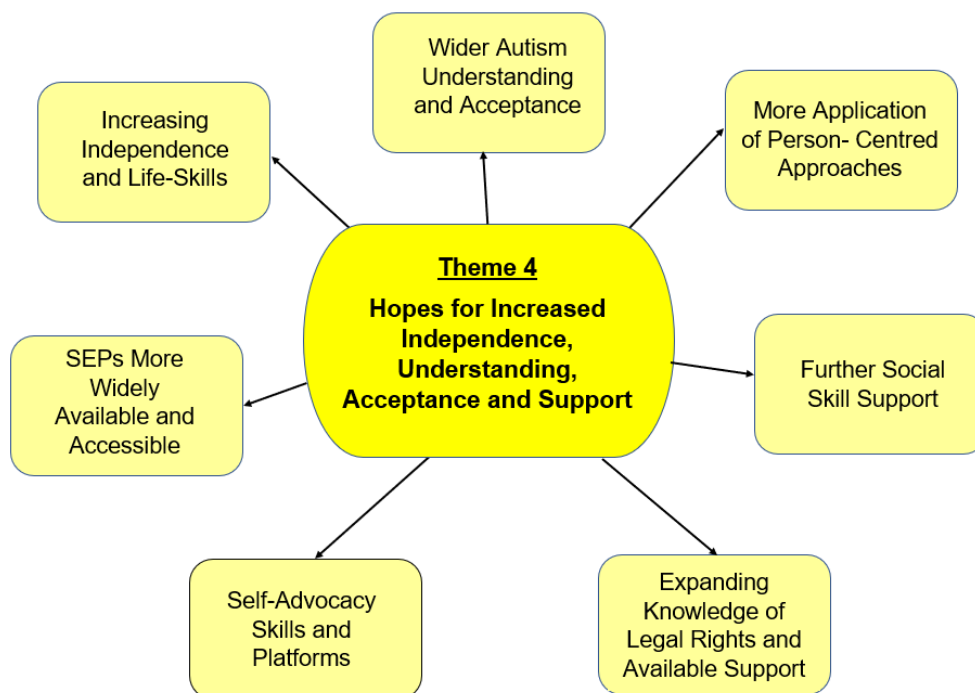
4.1.4.1 Subtheme: More Application of Person-Centred Approaches

The YP explained that they would like those supporting them to seek their views and consider their aspirations when decisions that affect them are made:

> 'I sometimes feel that I want people to help me more get to my future… ask what I want' (Participant 7).

> 'I think there needs to be more… asking what we want… other people not making decisions for everything… I don't always want to do what they might want (Participant 4).

Some of the YP expressed feeling that their work placements at the SEP do not always reflect their interests and aspirations:

> 'I sometimes feel a little bit like… the jobs aren't the right jobs… whereas I think that isn't really what I hope to do in my future' (Participant 2).

> 'In year two... I was sort of in a placement that I didn't really like the idea of being in… it wasn't something I wanted to do' (Participant 1)

Participant 1 considered how the SEP could involve the YP more in making work placement decisions, by asking their views:

'I think they should… ask if a student wants a certain placement… before they sort of… put them down for doing it' (Participant 1)

Participant 8 shared his/her thoughts on how SEP students could be involved in decisions around work placements, suggesting a shorter placement 'trial' before embarking on a 'full' placement:

'A work trial before doing the work placement at [SEP]… even if it is for one week… to make the student feel more reassured… to think is this the right work placement for me… or should I do something different' (Participant 8).

Many of the YP also expressed wanting those supporting them to get to know them more as individuals, feeling that this is an important part of knowing how to tailor support:

'[Job coach/employers] could get to know me more exactly… they would know more about how to help me' (Participant 2).

'I want to do animation… I don't know they know that but they didn't ask so I don't get support to do that' (Participant 4).

Participant 2 considered how this could be done, perhaps through more time to 'bond' with those supporting them such as job coaches and employers:

'Maybe if there were more opportunities to bond' (Participant 2).

4.1.4.2 Subtheme: Further Social Support

Many of the YP expressed wanting further support to develop their social skills and to engage in more social activities, to enable them to develop their social communication skills and experience more social activities with others:

'More opportunities to work on social skills and communication… learning and also getting to go and do more stuff' (Participant 5).

'I think more social things… so I can get better and… and I like going out to restaurants and bowling' (Participant 6).

Considering the format of this support, some YP expressed that debate clubs may assist with developing the YP's social skills:

'Maybe like a club to talk about stuff and have conversations… debate practice maybe' (Participant 1).

'We can have like open debates workshops … I think it helps to practice more communication and um it can express our ideas and opinions to them… and also to keep the conversation going' (Participant 5).

Considering the content of the debate clubs, Participant 5 shared that talking about world issues/events may be helpful:

'Maybe about um… what's happening in the world… globally… we could learn how to talk to each other but also about stuff that we can talk to people about when we're at our workplaces… like stuff in the news' (Participant 5)

Others considered how the explicit teaching of some social skills and role plays would be helpful:

'Teaching me and practicing with me… like what I can ask someone to keep a conversation going' (Participant 3).

'Role play… that was helpful… more of that is definitely helpful… like for social skills because it's hard to know how to come across like a good person when you're at an interview or with other people... I need to practice these things… not just talk… talk about them' (Participant 6).

There were many YP who expressed an interest in engaging in more social events, organised by the SEP staff:

'I would say more activities… social activities… I get to feel closer with the other students and make good friends… and help to improve communication' (Participant 5).

'I really love the social events and I want more… going out places and doing stuff' (Participant 6).

Some YP considered how some further guidance/structured opportunities for social interactions/games during break and lunch times during SEP class days would be good:

'Maybe help for like a friendship group or something… like at [SEP] being able to like… have a conversation at lunch time because I know it can be quite silent or awkward so um…. I think probably a lot of us would like… benefit from that' (Participant 2).

'There used to be the football table at [SEP] and we used to enjoy it but… it was then moved to another building… we used to play with it but then we had nothing during break time… we would socialise and be sociable at the breaks but then no one did once it went' (Participant 5).

4.1.4.3 Subtheme: Expanding Knowledge of Legal Rights and Available Support

Many of the YP made reference to their legal rights and what support they are entitled

to as an autistic person as something they would like to know more about.

For example, reasonable adjustments:

'The adjustment things… the support I am allowed… I want to know what that is really' (Participant 6).

'Those things… the reasonable adjustments… I know what that is now a bit... but like… I don't really… understand it and what I can get if that makes sense… I think I should know more about it' (Participant 7).

Participant 7 felt that this knowledge and understanding would support him/her to

secure and maintain employment:

'I need to know what support I can have so that I can get it… and tell my manager when I work there' (Participant 7).

Some YP mentioned knowing about some support he/she may be entitled to following

the SEP, seemingly referencing 'Access to Work' support:

'Even after [SEP] you can get support from people who come and see you… but I don't know exactly what it's called… sorry… um… I'd like to know more about that for the end' (Participant 1).

'I know after [SEP] there's people that can help so something about that' (Participant 2).

4.1.4.4 Subtheme: Self-Advocacy Skills and Platforms

Many of the YP expressed wanting to learn the skills needed to self-advocate, as well

as be provided with platforms to do this.

For some YP, this meant learning the skills to seek support and explain to those around them how they can help:

> *'To learn how to like… say to others what I need… to be able to explain that so they know how to help me without someone else having to do that for me' (Participant 2).*

> *'How to ask for help that I need from other people… that like… will definitely help me to stay in a job' (Participant 7).*

For others, they expressed wanting to learn the skills needed to tell others about their autism diagnoses and what it means for them:

> *'So I could talk to people more about what autism is… my autism … but yeah not knowing how to do it would be the issue' (Participant 1).*

> *'Explaining about my autism to other people… that can be hard to do like what to say to explain it' (Participant 3).*

Some YP expressed a desire to share their experiences as an autistic person, in a way that could help others:

> *'I could then help someone to tell others about being autistic… other autistic people' (Participant 2).*

> *'I would love to share with more people... to educate others on autism so they understand and for other people who are autistic… to show them I have it too' (Participant 8)*

Participant 8 reflected on why this is important to him/her:

> *'There should be more recognition for people with autism… to be respected for who they really are… if people to listen to us… before it's too little too late really… we need to see the light at the end of the tunnel… I want to do more of that.' (Participant 8).*

4.1.4.5 Subtheme: Increasing Independence and Life Skills

All of the YP commented that they aspire to become more independent, and develop life skills that would enable them to do this.

Developing independence was evidently important to many of the YP:

> *'So I can be independent' (Participant 5).*

> *'Because I want to be independent… not just be sitting at home having my mum look after me' (Participant 7).*

> *'Being more independent is important to me' (Participant 2)*

> *'I want to live an independent life' (Participant 6).*

For some people, they felt that learning particular skills relating to daily life would help them to increase their independence:

> *'To do more life skills… how to live more independently… learning how to use an oven… learning to use… an iron (Participant 1).*

> *'I'm still working on my time keeping skills it's not all that great… so more help with that would be good' (Participant 7).*

Participant 1 and 7 felt that these skills would help them in their journeys in to employment:

> *'When I need to iron a shirt for work' (Participant 1).*

> *'If I am late for work or anything like an interview then they won't want me to work there' (Participant 7).*

Some YP expressed interest in learning how to manage money, expressing that learning how to become financially independent was important:

> *'Money's the main thing that we need to understand like what is money about… how to count money how to keep change… how to look after it' (Participant 5).*

> *'When I do… earn my own money and like… know how to look after it… pay for things' (Participant 7).*

For others, although the travel training was helpful, they expressed wanting more of this support to enable them to travel independently:

> *'More travel training… coming with me on journeys… it hasn't happened as much I would think… it would be helpful because I can go somewhere properly' (Participant 4).*

> *'Someone to go with me to practice more… I can't do it on my own yet' (Participant 6).*

4.1.4.6 Subtheme: SEPs more Widely Available and Accessible

This subtheme reflects how positively the YP felt overall regarding the support they have received from the SEP and how they expressed feeling that more of these should be available as a result, so that more autistic YP can have access to this support.

All of the YP expressed gratitude and thanks for the support they received on the SEP, feeling that they have benefitted in many ways from accessing this support:

> *'It has helped me out drastically… for lots of reasons… I am thankful to them all honestly (Participant 8).*

> *'I am a different person… a better person… happier' (Participant 5).*

> *'I wasn't the person I am now when I started… I am very grateful to them' (Participant 2).*

> *'So glad I went to [SEP]… I feel very lucky to have had that chance' (Participant 6).*

> *'I am one of the lucky ones' (Participant 7).*

Many of the YP reported that there are not many SEPs of this nature available, expressing that if more were, this would benefit more autistic YP:

> *'More places like [SEP] would be really good… because it's more support for people autistic' (Participant 7).*

> *'One thing I think that should happen… they won't just have one centre in [borough]… they might have other centres in… for example… [borough]… and others… then it makes it more available… for others to take the opportunity' (Participant 8).*

Participant 2 expressed the importance of this, reporting that he/she has to travel 'far' to access this SEP, highlighting that this may mean many autistic people cannot access this support:

> *'I travel which is quite far… it takes a long time but there's nothing like this any closer to me so… other people who can't travel that far may not get the chance to go there (Participant 2).*

4.1.4.7 Subtheme: Wider Autism Understanding and Acceptance

All of the YP expressed wanting there to be wider societal autism understanding and

acceptance, similar to that that they experience at the SEP:

> *'More people need to know what autism is all about' (Participant 4).*

> *'Everyone should know about autism… definitely more and more need to know… if there was more people who understood they would accept us in' (Participant 5).*

> *'Like what they know at [SEP]… what autism is… like what it means… and that we can be part of society' (Participant 2).*

They associated this understanding and acceptance with others being more willing

and able to implement adjustments and support for them:

> *'They would see we just need a bit of support and would do it' (Participant 5).*

Some of the YP considered how they felt this wider autism understanding and

acceptance could be achieved through workplace training opportunities:

> *'I think a lot of companies should have the training on… and sort of be educated better on people's autism… and how they're… able to work and not be a burden to anyone' (Participant 1).*

> *'The employers should be… trained how to handle people with different learning difficulties like autism' (Participant 3).*

> *'If more like workplaces… had some sort of training in autism… um... providing training I don't mean just like a tick box little questionnaire thing… um… I mean like a more in depth training so... they do understand' (Participant 2).*

Participant 7 considered the training the SEP provide for some workplaces currently

who provide some work placements, expressing that they would like this training to be

delivered to all placement providers:

> *'Maybe do a bit more… seminars for like workplaces and like… autism training and stuff like that… [SEP] do that but I think it's only if someone asks for it' (Participant 7).*

Many expressed feeling that a wider autism awareness and acceptance would have a positive impact on their transitions into employment, making this transition easier and more likely to be successful:

> *'It would sort of be easier for people to apply and for people to be in a paid position… in jobs… the people who are interviewing them would know that autism doesn't just mean they can't do the job' (Participant 1).*

> *'I think that would be really helpful to people getting a job who are autistic' (Participant 2).*

> *'Because many won't want to employ people with autism because the support we need means it will cost money and… if they knew more about autism they would know it don't really cost much really… just wouldn't push us away (Participant 7).*

There were also many comments reflecting the YP's views regarding the emotional and psychological impact this wider understanding and acceptance would have for these YP:

> *'It would mean people would give us a chance and it would… would feel amazing (Participant 5).*

> *'I would feel on top of the world' (Participant 8).*

> *'I would do a dance' (Participant 4).*

> *'I think it would change my life because… I would like it' (Participant 6).*

4.2 Findings from a Thematic Analysis of Phase Two Data (SEP Staff Focus Group)

Table 4 presents an overview of the theme and associated subthemes that emerged from the phase two data.

Table 4. *Theme and Subthemes from Phase Two Data*

Theme	*Subthemes*
5. Valuable Contributions from EPs/EPSs to Support SEP Students Learning, Wellbeing, Support and Outcomes	• Supporting and Upskilling SEP Staff through Bespoke Training, Workshops and Supervision • Tailored Support for Individual YP • Group Interventions and Support for YP, Parents and Placement Providers • Development of Models and Frameworks of Support within SEP • Building Positive Working Relationships with SEPs

4.2.1 Theme Five: Valuable Contributions from EPs/EPSs to Support SEP Students Learning, Wellbeing, Support and Outcomes

This theme illustrates the value the SEP staff expressed in the role of EPs within SEPs

and the nature of this work the SEP staff feel EPs/EPSs could offer in order to support

the YP's learning, wellbeing, support and outcomes relating to employment. See

Figure 10.

Figure 10. *Visual Depiction of Theme 5: Valuable Contributions from EPs/EPSs to Support SEP Students Learning, Wellbeing, Support and Outcomes*
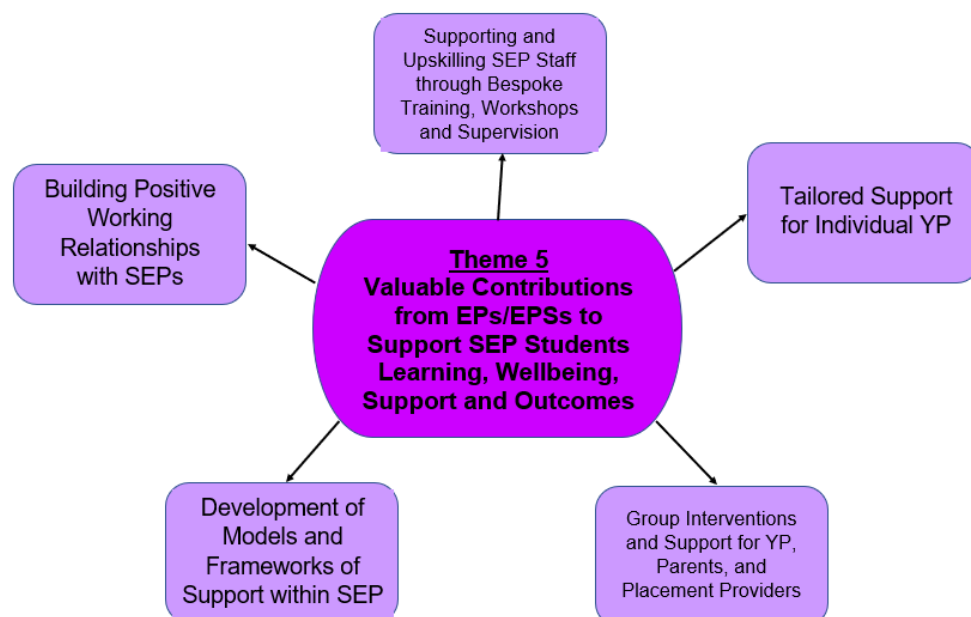
4.2.1.1   Subtheme: Supporting and Upskilling SEP Staff through Bespoke

Training, Workshops and Supervision

In response to the YP's views relating to them expressing a desire for more person-centred support and more individual understanding of them, the SEP staff expressed that their capacity in order to support the YP more in line with this could be developed through bespoke training, workshops and supervision.

> *'Training and things would be good and like… teaching us how to put that stuff into practice and support us with this… yeah that would be great' (Participant 1).*

> *'All of those things… sign me up!' (Participant 5).*

Some expressed feeling that support to widen their capacities to be more person-centred, possibly widening their knowledge of psychological approaches and tools would be valuable:

> *'For specific… ways that an EP knows that we can be more person-centred if that's what [the students] want' (Participant 3).*

SEP staff explained such methods (training, workshops and supervision) could also support SEP staff to widen their understanding of other SEND, diagnoses and/or difficulties the YP may be experiencing, contributing to developing better understanding of the YP and how to support them:

> *'We have students that come to us… they all have a diagnosis of autism… but the majority of them have an additional diagnosis of dyslexia or dyspraxia or anything like that but we… I don't want to speak for everyone but I don't think that we… feel confident in those other areas whereas we may feel really confident with autism… we need to be upskilled in those sort of areas' (Participant 1).*

> *'Mental health and wellbeing and how to support would be good… knowing more about it as well… especially given the things the YP have said about how they feel' (Participant 3).*

> *'Upskilling of our staff… to give them those like… strategies and like… ways of kind of um… supporting our students that have these specific… issues whatever it may be… like processing and memory' (Participant 7).*

There was emphasis from many SEP staff members relating to the benefits of such supports being bespoke and in response to the SEP needs, expressing that they feel this would enable this support to be tailored to the unique challenges experienced throughout a SEP and the unique training needs they may have:

> *'With training from other places I think… it tends to be very general… an EP wouldn't be necessarily be mental health specific but they would have an area of understanding of like mental health and autism… which is what we tend to find that… you know… there's a lot of mental health stuff and then there's autism stuff but their often not very um… joined… so that would be good like training and stuff that is right for us' (Participant 3).*

Participant 5 identified how upskilling staff in this way will have a beneficial impact on the students:

> *'I think we feel that we need that support so then… that will always sort of… trickle down to our students getting better support… and given what they have said there's definitely things we can do to develop if we have that support' (Participant 5)*

Referring specifically to supervision opportunities, some SEP staff reflected on how this would be helpful for them so that they could seek guidance and support when needed:

> *'Stuff that we… we don't feel confident in… to have someone to go back and… you know… chat to about that and them know the cases… know the case for… would really help' (Participant 7).*

> *'To have like supervision with someone who would be able to help [us] navigate through those situations because I don't feel like I am able to sometimes… um and I'm thinking about like… we have a young person at the moment.. who has lots and lots of needs and his job coach is very overwhelmed… with the things that are going on… and whilst I can try to support… having someone she can go to for supervision… talking specifically about those conditions and how to support them… would be really beneficial' (Participant 6).*

> *'I think even just having reassurance… and… maybe confidence in your decision making…from someone who is a bit more specialised would support because sometimes you just feel a bit like out of your depth' (Participant 3).*

4.2.1.2   Subtheme: Tailored Support for Individual YP

The SEP staff expressed that access to tailored support for individual YP from EPs

would be helpful.

For example, individual assessment to provide insight into the YP's strengths and

difficulties to guide the support they can provide:

> *'Using psychological assessment to help us learn more about what they find difficult and also what they are good at and then we will have more of an update and understanding of what areas they should get more support in' (Participant 3).*

Some also expressed feeling that the provision of one-to-one interventions for YP may

support them in some of the areas they have identified:

> *'Possibly around um… wellbeing… and obviously access to services is… you know… ridiculous waiting lists and everything like that' (Participant 7).*

> *'Yeah things to support their feelings about themselves and maybe around emotions… those things about regulating and stuff' (Participant 2).*

> *'I was just also thinking about things like CBT… it… it could be very helpful for our young people' (Participant 7).*

SEP staff referred to the EPs role in using their skills in eliciting the YP's voices and

advocating for them:

> *'Imagine having an EP last year when we had like [student] review… stuff like that… it would be very helpful for him' (Participant 1).*

> *[R: what would have been helpful there?]*

> *'He… um… very difficult relationship with his mother and the mum wanted one thing and it seemed a bit like he wanted another thing… I'm not sure…and when it went into the review it was like mum got her way… just having someone else… to get that out of him and in that meeting… would have been supportive for him' (Participant 1).*

SEP staff also identified that having someone to contribute to support for individual YP

by problem-solving, identifying next steps and advising them on support would be

helpful:

> *'[student] struggles quite a lot and that impacts on his learning quite a bit… um so… help around that to… he's been with us for so long and progress in terms*

of education is very little… even though there's so much potential… but we… really like I don't know like what else we can do… so that help where we could… I think I've hit… a wall at the moment' (Participant 5).

'That is good because it's more specific to that individual… like you can go on these training courses but… with an individual you need quite specific strategies and support with… that like training isn't going to give you.

SEP staff also considered the benefits of having support to identify and build wider support networks around individual YP:

'You know someone who knows what support in the borough is available and how to get everyone working together' (Participant 7).

4.2.1.3   Subtheme: Group Interventions and Support for YP, Parents and

Placement Providers

This subtheme encapsulates the SEP staff's thoughts regarding group interventions and supports that they feel could be offered by the EP for YP, their parents and placement providers.

Some expressed feeling that the EP could support groups of placement providers in developing their understanding of autism, appropriate supports and implementation of adjustments for individual YP, as well as wider understanding of other difficulties/needs:

'Training and support groups for employers to help develop that understanding and what they can actually do to help… and also… like um… other things like mental health for autistic people' (Participant 1).

'yeah although we do autism training I think from that specialised person would be good and bring those people together is a good idea' (Participant 1).

They felt similar supports also might be helpful for the YP's parents:

'We find a lot of the time… [parents] come to us and they kind of have no idea how to support that young person… and… we… we try to obviously help to support the families but we don't have enough time so I think… definitely help with… speaking to the families about how they can be supporting the young people at home… as a group a supportive group' (Participant 7).

'Sometimes we all assume that parents know… exactly about autism and for their child but if they had never actually known about autism… and they have just developed their knowledge of autism without support they may actually really benefit from a support group and maybe some training they might want that' (Participant 3).

Group support and interventions were also identified as possibly beneficial for the YP, in light of their views, relating to topics such as group therapeutic interventions, reasonable adjustments and social skills:

'For the students to learn together from some specialist in social skills and maybe also some of those group interventions like group CBT or stuff like that' (Participant 5).

'About the reasonable adjustments as well like some sort of intervention to help them with learn more about that from someone who can support their understanding there more' (Participant 2).

4.2.1.4   Subtheme: Development of Models and Frameworks of Support within SEP

The SEP staff identified that a valuable contribution from the EP, in light of the YP's views, could be in supporting the SEP to develop models and frameworks of support within SEP.

For example, relating to the programme support around social skills and social opportunities:

'Obviously we want to offer [lunch groups/discussion groups] to the people that do want it… um… but I guess that was the only one that was a bit like… you never quite sure how to balance that… because so many don't want that so its about how can we create support for that that isn't compulsory but offers what they want and also encourages them to develop their own skills to organise stuff themselves' (Participant 7)

Additionally, support to develop frameworks around review formats and procedures, such as person-centred and solution-focused to enable the YP reach their own aspirations and not focus on their difficulties:

'I think definitely with annual reviews and our reviews its always useful to have… that… you know… the expert knowledge on when we are trying to think of like… what were working toward and… trying not to focus or speak too much about the negatives… they need to be spoken about but like don't want to affect their confidence… you know like setting positive targets maybe and to make sure they are kind of like… smart… but also that we are putting the right strategies in place for them to get there and think about that' (Participant 7).

'Looking at the review process… like the EHCP review where you are particularly going through the uh… weaknesses.. sort of… looking at that to see how we can change that… because that isn't… that isn't the nicest thing when you're just constantly saying these are the areas you got to work on… it should be more of a celebration of what they have… what they have achieved' (Participant 1).

Frameworks and models around shared language, supporting wellbeing and positive identities were also identified by the SEP staff:

'[YP views] made me think that sometimes… with our language… I think… I think we are… obviously we are… we always try and talk about the positives… and we are very supportive at [SEP]…. but you can just… end up talking about things that… autistic people particularly find difficult and stuff like… you are… you are going to need to touch on them… but the actual… the impact of doing that all the time… how they might feel about themselves… so yeah thinking about how we do that' (Participant 3).

The SEP staff expressed that the EP role could support them in developing their models of support around developing independence and life skills:

'We are actually talking about [independence/life skills] about next year… having a person that does more independent skills… living skills… so… I felt like… for me and I guess… for a lot of people it was like yep… you know… it kind of was consistent with what we are hoping to do so yeah maybe around designing and implementing that' (Participant 3).

There was also interest in EP support in developing a balanced approach to support and preparing YP for employment alongside supporting societal and environmental change:

'It's tricky because you want to be realistic… like that's what the world is like at the moment… and I'm often saying like… you know… in an ideal world it would look like this… but in reality when you get a job it is going to look like this... that's how it is right now… or you need to think realistically… about what an employer might do or think or whatever… but… I don't know… yeah… just find that tricky a little bit… so yeah balancing that in the support we offer the students and with work with employers' (Participant 3).

4.2.1.5   Subtheme: Building Positive Working Relationships with SEPs

The SEP staff identified that an important part of increasing EP/EPS work with SEPs to improve the YP's access to such support relates to the need for positive working relationships to be built between EPSs and SEPs.

They expressed feeling that there was a role for EPs/EPSs in 'reaching out' to SEPs to begin building this working relationship to ensure SEPs are aware that this is available:

> *'I think reaching out to us first to tell us that this support is available... it's not something I have ever known about but it sounds great… so I think it's like awareness of this support being there' (Participant 1).*
> *'Coming to us and telling us that we can get this and that it is out there' (Participant 3).*

Some SEP staff explained that it is important for EPs/EPSs to explain to SEPs what the practicalities are of working with the EPS, such as costing price and where this comes from and referral processes:

> *'I don't know about cost but I'm assuming it comes with a fee… which is… is it like through the local authority?... Would it add to the fees or… I don't know… and like tell us about how to make referrals and how does it work' (Participant 7).*

> *'I have no idea about how it would be costed so that's something we would need to be given information on' (Participant 1).*

SEP staff also said that EPs/EPSs have a role in building awareness and understanding of the EP role and the support they can provide to ensure SEPs are aware of what is available and how this may 'fit' within the SEP system and structure:

> *'I actually knew very little about the EP role before this too so yeah definitely to tell us about the role and what we can actually access through the service (Participant 5).*

> *'I think if we knew more about this we would have definitely already worked with them… it could really help our students' (Participant 1).*

Chapter 5: Discussion

This section will begin with a brief overview of the current study to orientate the reader in preparation for discussion of the study findings. The study findings will then be discussed, within the framework of the research questions. Links with past research will be identified and implications of this research will be considered, along with my reflexivity. This section will also identify research strengths and limitations, make suggestions for future research, and outline the research dissemination plans. Lastly, my concluding thoughts on the study will presented.

5.1 Overview of the Current Study's Aims

The current study aimed to elicit autistic YP's views and experiences of transitioning into employment and receiving support from an autism-specific SEP. It aimed to build a deeper understanding of autistic YP's thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences of their opportunities and barriers to employment, the SEP support they have found helpful, and what additional support they feel is required in order for them to be better prepared for, and supported into, employment. This research also aimed to explore the potential role for EPs in supporting these YP within SEP settings.

5.2 Research Question 1: What are autistic YP's views and experiences of the opportunities for, and barriers to, employment for the autistic population?

This research question can be answered with two of the themes identified within this current study. Theme One ('conceptualising autism: the combination and interaction of individual and environmental factors') and some subthemes from theme two ('autism identities: juxtaposed feelings') are relevant to this research question.

One of the most significant findings of this research, as highlighted by theme one, is that the YP identified opportunities and barriers to employment relating to both individual and environmental/societal factors. Some of the subthemes from theme one encapsulate the specific barriers identified by the YP within these two factors. For example, they identified individual difficulties such as 'social awareness and communication difficulties', 'cognitive and language skill difficulties', 'sensory needs', and 'difficulties understanding, communicating and regulating emotions' as having a negative impact on their ability to access and sustain employment opportunities. They report such difficulties as creating additional challenges during their search for vacancies and completion of applications, engagement in interviews, settling within the workplace team, and completing aspects of a role in line with others. However, they also identified several environmental/societal factors impacting their employment opportunities. For example, the subthemes 'others' level of autism awareness and understanding', 'the role of appropriate and relevant support', and 'stereotyping and discrimination' all encapsulate some barriers to employment for the autistic population associated with their environment/society. This suggests that the YP view there is a mixture of individual and environmental barriers to employment present for the autistic population, rather than individual barriers only (as would be perceived by the MM) or societal barriers only (in line with the SMD). This seems to be consistent with Rudnick's (2017) views that there is a false dichotomy between these two models (in that they are neither mutually exclusive, nor are they jointly exhaustive). Further, consistent with literature review conclusions regarding these two models, the YP seem to indicate that a more nuanced perspective of the barriers to employment for autistic YP is required than what is offered by either the MM or the SMD.

A further interesting finding relates to the YP's views concerning the combination and interaction of these individual and environmental/societal factors in creating barriers to employment. For example, the YP explained that it is the combination and interaction of cognitive and language skill difficulties, along with a lack of appropriate and relevant support, that can cause transitions into employment to be challenging (such as when completing job applications and/or when in employment and if support is not available). The same environmental/societal factors, in combination and interaction with the YP's reported difficulties relating to social awareness and communication, can also create barriers (including during engagement with interviews and in settling in within the workplace team). This notion resonates with the findings of Milton (2012), which suggests that there exists a 'double empathy problem', in that problems arise as a result of mutual challenges (Crompton et al., 2020) between autistic and non-autistic people. This indicates that the YP perhaps view that there is a shared responsibility for overcoming the barriers to employment for autistic people.

Some subthemes of theme two are also relevant to answering this research question. This theme highlights the YP's psychological and emotional thoughts and feelings relating to their identities as an autistic person, consisting of both positive and negative feelings. Some negative feelings, such as 'low confidence and self-esteem' relating to their abilities were associated with low optimism about gaining employment and therefore a lack of motivation and willingness to apply, creating a barrier in itself to securing employment. It seems possible that such feelings are associated with the combination and interaction of the barriers highlighted in theme one. They suggest that the difficulties accessing opportunities in line with others has a negative impact on their psychological wellbeing and self-perceptions/autistic identities, in turn having

a negative impact on their employment outcomes due to lack of confidence, motivation and willingness to apply, and out of fear of rejection. This highlights the psychological impact of the autistic population experiencing barriers to employment as identified in theme one, and how this can contribute to exacerbating unemployment issues amongst this population. It therefore seems vital that more support is provided in order to address this combination and interaction of factors creating barriers to employment in order to support these YP into employment more successfully and improve their psychological wellbeing and feelings of positive self-identities. This also provides further evidence that the biopsychosocial model is more consistent with the views of autistic YP (consistent with claims of researchers such as Kapp, 2013) relating to barriers to employment, as it acknowledges the role of all three factors within this (biological/individual, psychological and social/environmental).

Similarly, the YP's views relating to the opportunities to employment for the autistic population seemed to reflect a combination and interaction of factors, encapsulated by the theme one subthemes 'positive and unique skills and qualities', 'others' level of autism awareness and understanding', and 'the role of appropriate and relevant support'. These subthemes highlight that the YP could identify many of their personal skills and qualities that they feel make them valuable to an employer and perform well in a job role (consistent with findings by Baldwin et al., 2014; de Schipper et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2014), and can be demonstrated and utilised well when in an environment where others understand autism and can implement appropriate and relevant support, creating employment opportunities for the YP. The subtheme 'ownership and pride' within theme two encapsulates the positive feelings the YP associated with being autistic and related to these positive skills and qualities. This further highlights the

combination and interaction of individual and environmental factors in creating opportunities and/or barriers for employment, along with the psychological factors, consistent with the more interactive and broader framework of disability; the biopsychosocial model.

5.3 Research Question 2: What support provided by an autism-specific SEP do autistic YP find helpful in supporting them into employment?

This research question can be answered with the theme 'the value of practical learning alongside understanding, acceptance, adjustments and advocacy', as was highlighted within theme three of this study.

It seems evident from this theme that the YP perceive value in supports that address all three areas within the biopsychosocial model, providing further evidence that this model represents the views of this population in relation to employment opportunities/barriers and what support is therefore required and for whom (in line with claims by Kapp, 2013). The YP report valuing support that enables them to learn adaptive skills, alongside workplace/skill support, and changes within certain aspects of their environment/society (consistent with claims by researchers/authors such as Gerhardt & Holmes, 2005; Hagner & Cooney, 2005; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Iovannone et al., 2003; Kapp et al., 2013; Schall et al., 2006) that involve adjustments and promote feelings of understanding and acceptance, improving overall psychological wellbeing. This suggests that autistic YP value and want support that promotes positive development and change in both their individual skills and within their environment/society, alongside improving psychological wellbeing, consistent with the biopsychosocial model.

Although the YP place high value in many aspects of the support from the SEP, the subtheme 'practical and applied learning opportunities' highlights the value the YP place on the practical and applied components of the support they receive in order to develop numerous skills. This is consistent with claims made by some researchers that the workplace is the best place to learn employment skills and promote inclusion (O'Bryan et al., 2000). For example, the YP expressed value in the work placements and job coach support as providing opportunities for 'on the job learning', job searching and application support, supported interview practice through role plays and practicing questions, and travel training to enable them to develop the skills to travel independently (an aspect they identified as important for engaging with job opportunities). Such methods of support were identified as helpful for the YP as many explained it is more helpful to be 'shown' and to 'experience' something, suggesting that the YP find learning methods most helpful that are experiential and use techniques such as modelling, rather than solely based on language and explanation. This provides vital information regarding the format and method of support that these YP find helpful and that should be considered in the development of SEPs. It also demonstrates how the YP want to receive support aimed at developing particular skills, in line with claims by Kapp (2013).

Some of the YP identified that this method of support can also have wider benefits which they value. For example, the work placements were highlighted as also providing the YP with opportunities to demonstrate to an employer that they are capable of performing in a job role, without requiring an interview. As noted by one participant, this has resulted in some students being offered job roles, and provides an opportunity for employers to learn about working with an autistic person and

possibly contribute to positively impacting perspectives around autism and an autistic person's capabilities amongst employers. This is consistent with Beyer et al.'s (2016) findings that employers reported feeling more open minded about employing autistic individuals. It suggests that SEPs can contribute to addressing issues relating the findings by Hendricks and Wehman (2009) that autistic individuals can appear unsuitable to prospective employers, and evidence found by other researchers that employers have concerns relating to the costs of making adjustments, additional supervision requirements, sick leave, and employee productivity issues (Hernandez & McDonald, 2010; Ju et al., 2013; Unger, 2002). Findings of this study suggest that autistic YP notice and value support in the form of work placements due these wider systemic benefits in relation to improving employment opportunities and outcomes for autistic YP.

The YP also expressed value relating to the opportunities and support in the SEP for 'building employability – qualifications and experience'. The YP highlighted the value of these aspects when applying for jobs in order to demonstrate they may be suitable candidates for a role during the application stage, and therefore valued opportunities to build on this. This was an interesting finding, as many YP placed high value in this aspect of the SEP and seemed to perceive this as an integral part of improving access to employment opportunities. It therefore seems vital that such opportunities are part of SEPs. Achieving qualifications and building a work experience history also seemed to increase the YP's confidence and self-esteem, as well as sense of pride and achievement, promoting positive psychological wellbeing amongst the YP.

It is also important to consider the YP's views relating to the value of the 'SEP community acceptance and understanding of autism' that they report to experience in the SEP. The YP perceived this as a valuable component of the SEP, something they associated with the SEP staffs' understanding of autism and how to support autistic individuals. This is therefore an important part of a SEP to autistic YP and should be a priority for SEP teams to develop and sustain.

It is also important to highlight the emotional and psychological wellbeing improvements the YP expressed experiencing as a result of their participation in SEP and the support they received, along with the opportunities to build connections and develop relationships. The benefits of SEP participation is therefore wider than the intended focus of a SEP (improving employment rates/transition to employment), as improving psychological wellbeing, quality of life, and social connections are also key outcomes the YP associate with this support. This means that SEPs designed in this way can have a positive impact on the concerning findings relating to the impact of unemployment on the mental health quality of life of these YP that has is apparent within the literature (such as Fleming et al., 2013; Gerhardt & Lainer, 2011; Howlin & Magiati, 2017; Howlin et al., 2005; Wanberg, 2012), meaning that SEPs can have the potential for much wider benefits for this population than just supporting employment outcomes, and that these factors are important to these YP.

To conclude, this theme encapsulates the value the YP expressed in receiving practical and applied learning opportunities and supports to enable them to develop particular skills relevant to the individual factors they identified as barriers, alongside understanding, acceptance adjustments and advocacy in order to tackle the

environmental/societal factors they perceive as barriers to employment. This further supports the notion that the YP do not believe that the responsibility of overcoming barriers to employment should lay solely with them, nor society, but with both so that both can work together to break down such barriers and enable more autistic YP to transition into employment successfully.

5.4 Research Question 3: What additional support do autistic YP feel should be provided by an autism-specific SEP to better support them into employment?

The fourth identified theme in this study (hopes for increased independence, understanding, acceptance and support) has high relevance in answering this research question.

This theme encapsulates the YP's desire for increased independence, as well as wider understanding and acceptance of autism, and additional support in specific areas. This highlights the importance of such factors to these YP in improving their transitions to employment and employment outcomes.

Firstly, important to these YP is an increase in the application of person-centred supports. For example, the YP expressed wanting those supporting them to elicit and consider their career interests and aspirations when decisions are made about their work placements. The YP also expressed wanting those around them to get to know them more as individuals and to feel more involved in decisions around their support. This supports the government's prioritisation and promotion of person-centred supports and person-centred planning (DfE, 2022), by highlighting the YP's desire for this. Additionally, it suggests that the notion and/or application of vocational profiling could be improved.

The YP also reported a desire for more social skill support in the SEP, to improve their social awareness and communication skills. This further demonstrates the YP's desire to learn adaptive skills (consistent with Kapp et al.'s; 2013; suggestion). Helpful suggestions by the YP in doing so included the implementation of discussion groups to aid the development of such social skills. This is consistent with what has been highlighted in theme two relating to the YP's preference for support to take the form of being practical and applied.

Also important to these YP is increasing their independence and life skills. The YP reported wanting additional support to learn the skills needed to travel independently (more travel training) and socialise independently (more support around arranging social plans with others). They also highlighted a desire to learn specific life skills and highlighted the benefits of this, such as ironing and telling the time. The YP expressed that such skills would mean they could, for example, iron shirts for work and improve their time management skills to support them in arriving for work on time. This further supports the notion that these YP desire increased independence and made some helpful suggestions relating to how they could be supported to develop this on the SEP, in a way that is relevant to improving their employment outcomes.

A further interesting finding relates to the YP's desire to learn more about their legal rights and available support. Although many of the YP referred to 'reasonable adjustments' (the support employers are legally obliged to implement for disabled individuals to ensure equal access to opportunities, as is stated in the Equality Act; 2010) they expressed varied understandings of this term and what it means for them, expressing a desire to learn more. This suggests that the YP want to access

adjustments to enable them to have equal access within society and that they hope to develop knowledge and understanding of their entitlements.

Further to this, the YP expressed wanting to learn self-advocacy skills and access to platforms to share their thoughts, views and experiences with others. The YP felt such skills would enable them to explain their autism to others and seek the support they need from those around them, including from employers, having a positive impact on their employment success rates. Some also shared that being provided with platforms to share such information on a wider scale would contribute to empowering other autistic YP as well as increase autism awareness and understanding on a more systemic level, something that they expressed as important to them. This suggests the YP are eager to become self-advocates, yet feel they require additional support and guidance to feel able to do this.

It is important to note that all YP felt that wider autism understanding and acceptance is needed in order for them to feel better able to access employment opportunities. The YP's positive feelings toward the SEP staff's high level of understanding of autism and how to support is an important consideration here, as this suggests the YP do not feel the same can be said within the wider society. It was evident that they felt if there was a wider societal acceptance and understanding of autism, particularly amongst employers, this would enable more YP to access and secure employment, contributing to creating feelings of acceptance and inclusion for these YP. This demonstrates the YP desire for societal change.

Another important consideration is the YP's views relating to their hopes for SEPs to be more widely available and accessible, expressing this is an important aspect to improving autistic YP's successful transitions to employment. In line with many findings that SEPs are beneficial for many YP with a range of SEN, the YP in this study expressed positive feelings towards the SEP support they received and reported many benefits to participation. However, they noted that there are not many of these SEPs available, therefore noting that some students are required to travel some distance to access one, something that not all autistic YP may be able to do. This is an important consideration, as it demonstrates the YP's positive feelings towards the SEP and their hopes for much more of this support to be available so many more autistic YP can benefit.

5.5 Research Question 4: How can EPs and EPSs support autistic YP within SEP settings?

This research question can be answered with the final theme identified in this current study, theme five; 'valuable contributions from EPs/EPSs to support SEP students learning, wellbeing, support and outcomes'. This theme (elicited from phase two of this study; a focus group with SEP staff) highlights the range of work that EPs can engage in to support autistic YP on a SEP, that is both in line with the YP's views regarding the support they would like to receive, and that SEP staff would be interested in commissioning. These findings will be organised within the framework of the three levels of EPs' work (as defined by Scottish Executive, 2002); individual, group, and organisational.

5.5.1 Individual Level

The subtheme 'tailored support for individual YP' identified the range of work that an EP could engage in at an individual level that SEP staff felt could be a helpful contribution to supporting autistic YP on a SEP, in line with the YP's views.

Firstly, the SEP staff identified that EPs could make a valuable contribution to eliciting the YP's views and advocating for them. Consistent with claims made by Atkinson et al. (2015) they recognised that EPs' experience and skills would mean they are well placed to enable the YP to share their views, and to advocate for them where required, such as in meetings and reviews, where decisions are made about their support and next steps. This may seem particularly important and helpful for the YP, considering their hopes for more person-centred support, where their hopes and aspirations are considered and they are involved in the decisions that affect them.

SEP staff displayed interest in the individual assessment aspect of the EP's role, suggesting that such support could aid their understanding of the individual YP participating, through the exploration and update of individual YP's strengths and needs. This could then ensure support that is implemented is tailored to that individual and in line with their individual profiles, improving the support the SEP can provide for each YP.

Further, SEP staff expressed feeling that EPs could valuably contribute to problem-solving, identifying next steps and advising SEP staff on support for individual YP. This notion was also identified based upon the YP's desire for more person-centred approaches to be adopted by SEP staff, expressing that the EP could support SEP staff to consider each YP individually in depth, and identify what practical next steps

are needed for this YP to continue to feel supported in moving towards an identified aim.

Recognising the place of the EP and EPS within LAs, SEP staff expressed interest in EPs supporting in the identification and building of wider support networks around individual YP as they transition to accessing adult services. They expressed interest in the interpersonal and psychological skills EPs have that can be utilised to support joint working between those supporting the YP (such as parents, SEP staff, and other professionals), as well as signpost to other relevant services due to their knowledge of what's available within the LA (and eligibility criteria for these services/support) that could support the YP in other areas that they have identified wanting support in (such as social skills).

5.5.2 Group Level

The subthemes 'supporting and upskilling SEP staff through bespoke training, workshops and supervision' and 'group interventions and support for YP, parents, and placement providers' outline the support an EP could provide within a SEP setting that falls within the group level of EP work.

SEP staff identified that EPs wide knowledge and understanding of a range of SEN, could be valuable in supporting SEP staff to build their own knowledge and understanding of this through training, workshops and supervision. Whilst the SEP staff expressed having a good understanding of autism, they expressed feeling that their knowledge of other SEN that these YP may experience is not as established. SEP staff also expressed that training being 'bespoke' was appealing to them, as this

meant that training could be devised based on the SEP staff training needs, rather than pre-planned and generic. For example, training that focuses on psychological wellbeing and autism was an area the SEP staff identified as difficult to find from other services, but is something they would be interested in, based on the YPs' views in this research. They felt this could be devised by an EP, who they recognised as having good understanding and knowledge in these areas, therefore being well placed to devise and deliver valuable training on such topics.

EPs were also identified as a valuable resource to support SEP staff's knowledge and implementation of psychological approaches and tools to improve support provided for YP. For example, SEP staff could be trained on using a range of person-centred tools (such as PATH and MAPS) to improve the person-centred support available for the YP, where their hopes and aspirations can be at the heart of discussions, and be the foundations of the next steps and support agreed by those working with the YP.

SEP staff also expressed feeling that an EP could contribute through training, workshops and supervision to provide containment, guidance and reassurance for SEP staff. They all expressed interest in this as a service from EPs, due to feeling that this format of support is not available for SEP staff currently. This highlights the SEP staff's perceptions of how the EP's psychological knowledge and skills would be helpful in supporting staff in feeling equipped and supported to provide the best support possible for these YP.

A range of group interventions and support were also identified by SEP staff that would be useful for YP, their parents and placement providers. For example, they highlighted

that such supports could be used to widen autism awareness, understanding, and knowledge amongst parents and placement providers, suggesting that an EP would be well placed to deliver this. Furthermore, therapeutic and skills development interventions and groups were identified as possibly beneficial for groups of YP, in areas such as CBT, and supporting development of social skills and self-advocacy skills. The facilitation of support/sharing groups were also identified as possibly a helpful contribution the EP could make, which could be attended by YP, parents and placement providers, promoting inclusive practice and an opportunity to share resources/ideas about how these YP can be supported.

5.5.3 Organizational Level

The subthemes 'development of models and frameworks of support within SEP' and 'building positive working relationships with SEPs' are both relevant to the organisational level of the EPs' role.

Firstly, SEP staff identified that the EP could contribute to supporting the development of models and frameworks of support within SEPs. Areas identified where support would be helpful to establish models and frameworks of support related to developing whole-SEP approaches related to:

- A balanced approach to supporting/preparing YP for employment alongside supporting societal change.
- Clear review formats and procedures that are person-centred and solution focused, where areas for development can be highlighted but positively framed.
- The language culture and improving wellbeing/creating positive identities.

- The format and structure of social skill support and provision of social opportunities.

- The format and structure of introducing independence and life skills support.

This suggests that SEPs feel EP support in identifying and defining programme aims, what support is provided, and how, would be beneficial for SEPs. This provides opportunities for EPs to support on a more organisational level, and therefore support the YP indirectly through supporting the development of a programme.

SEP staff also highlighted the role for EPs/EPSs in building positive working relationships with SEPs, by 'reaching out' to these programmes, building awareness and understanding of the EP role and the support available, and explaining the practicalities of working with an EPS such as how costing is calculated and time available. This provides guidance for how EPs can begin to work with such settings more often, and what information is important for EPSs to share with SEPs, as well as other services/provisions that have not worked with EPSs prior to the extension to the EP role.

Overall, this theme highlights that SEP staff are interested in working with EPs and EPSs and were able to identify many aspects of the EP's role that would be helpful and applicable to the SEP setting. Therefore, this confirms that there is a valuable contribution to be made by EPs within SEP settings and that these settings would be interested in providing this support for the YP.

5.6 Research Implications

This research contributes to filling some of the current gaps within the literature by providing insight into the views and experiences of autistic YP of transitioning into employment and receiving support from a SEP, as well as considering the EP's role within such settings in a way that is responsive to these YP's views. This therefore will have implications for many stakeholders, including SEPs and SEP staff, EPs and EPSs, other professionals/services working with this population, LAs, UK government, and society as a whole.

This research has implications for SEPs and SEP staff as it provides some guidance as to what support they should be providing for autistic YP and what format this support should take. Findings suggest that autistic YP perceive opportunities and barriers to employment as reflective of the biopsychosocial model, and that the support they find helpful/desire more of also seems reflective of this. Therefore, this research can support SEPs in developing programmes of support that are based upon this, creating SEPs that provide support consistent with what these YP say is helpful for them. Such guidance may provide a helpful framework for SEPs to be developed upon, facilitating improvements in the support available for this population.

This research also has many implications for EPs and EPSs, including the way in which EPs should be supporting autistic YP during and throughout their transitions into employment, and what services EPSs should be offering provisions such as SEPs. This research has highlighted and outlined the key role and valuable contribution of EPs in supporting autistic YPs transitions into employment, where their knowledge and skills can be utilised to create positive change for these YP at the individual, group

and organizational level. What the YP value is clear, particularly relating to their support involving individual supports alongside efforts to facilitate adaptations in their environment and promote societal change. EPs should therefore be working to support this population with this in mind. EPs and EPSs may also be well placed to support the development of government guidance relating to SEPs, particularly around the implementation of person-centred approaches and tools (such as PATHs and MAPS) and how these could be incorporated into vocational profiling procedures, contributing to ensuring the YP's interests, goals and aspirations are guiding the support they receive. With their positioning, EPs can also influence change, and therefore a duty to do so in the best interests of the YP they support. EPs and EPSs therefore have a key role in listening to these YP and consider how they can support this population, build capacity to support in those around them, as well as facilitate the societal changes the YP wish to see.

This research also has implications for all professionals working with this population more broadly, as it sheds light on what approaches/support these YP feel is beneficial and what further support they feel is needed. It provides guidance on how a range of professionals could be supporting these YP as they transition into adult services. Furthermore, the YP's overall positive experiences and views of participating in a SEP indicates that professionals supporting these YP in preparing for their transitions into employment have a role in sharing information relating to these programs to these YP and supporting them in identifying if this may be appropriate for them.

This research also has wider implications, such as for LAs and in the development of government guidance for SEPs. It seems apparent that these YP feel more SEPs of

this nature should be available in the UK, and LAs and UK government therefore should consider this when conversations around funding and support provisions are taking place.

It is also important to consider the implications for society, as it seems evident these YP continue to feel disadvantaged, having significant implications for their wellbeing and self-perceptions/identities. This is an issue that needs to be prioritised and requires careful consideration as to how this can be addressed, as this cannot continue. Consistent with these YP's views, there is still work that needs to be done to move towards a more inclusive society, something which is arguable everyone's responsibility. This societal change seems particularly important in light of the psychological wellbeing improvements an accepting and understanding environment can have for this population, as highlighted in this research. Although some may question whose role it is to create this societal change, it could be argued that everyone is responsible for this. An interesting finding of this study in relation to this is the wider benefits that the work placements can result in, such as changing perspectives of employers around autism and sometimes resulting in job offers. This suggests that societal questions and considerations, relating to common recruitment systems and procedures, could be an area to begin with. For example, new systems of assessing if an individual is capable of fulfilling a job role (such as through more employers using work trials as opposed to interview only) could not only improve employment outcomes for autistic people but also ensure employers hire the 'right' person for the job. Such efforts could contribute to improvements in societal awareness, understanding, and acceptance of autism.

5.6.1 Retrospective Reflexivity

This research also has direct implications for me, as the researcher, personally and professionally. Engaging in this research process has resulted in much professional and personal learning for me that will have many implications within my current role as a TEP, and in my future role as a qualified EP. Firstly, the way in which I support autistic YP will be further developed based upon my learning through engagement with the autistic participants and the findings of this study. Most notably, the adoption of person-centred approaches in my work with these YP is something I have reflected upon and been considering throughout, given the importance of this to these YP. It has encouraged me to consider how these values and tools can be applied through more of my work with YP and when working with those who support them.

Conducting this research has also developed my understanding of what my role could be in working with SEPs, including how to build relationships with such settings, and what this work might look like. I will be applying this new knowledge and understanding within my professional practice, by reaching out to SEPs within the borough and supporting the EPS to do this more widely.

5.7 Strengths and Limitations of this Study

5.7.1 Strengths

The many strengths of this study will now be outlined. Firstly, this novel study offers a unique and valuable contribution to the literature. It explores autistic YP's employment opportunities and barriers, helpful SEP support, and what further support is needed, through the collection of rich qualitative data, gathered directly from these YP

themselves. This is something that has not previously been done and therefore makes a substantial and valuable contribution to current gaps within the relevant literature.

This study, which offers insight and guidance into how autistic YP feel they can be best supported into employment, also makes a valuable contribution in light of the literature highlighting the importance of work to autistic people and the protective factors employment offers, particularly relating to mental health. For example, employment leading to feelings of social inclusion (Gannon & Nolan, 2007; Jahoda et al., 2009), general fulfilment, independence, belongingness and self-efficacy (Katz et al. (2015), increased self-esteem (Banks et al.; 2010) amongst the autistic population, and in the contrary, unemployment identified as having a negative impact on socioeconomic status, quality of life, social inclusion, independence and mental health (Fleming et al., 2013; Gerhardt & Lainer, 2011; Howlin & Magiati, 2017; Howlin et al., 2005; Wanberg, 2012). This study's findings, the implications of these findings on the practise of those supporting autistic YP, and the consequent potential for improving employment outcomes amongst the autistic population, therefore has the potential to contribute to supporting improvements in the mental health and wellbeing of this population.

Furthermore, the consideration and exploration of the EPs' role within SEP settings is also a novel area of study. Conducting this exploration in a way that is guided by these YP's views ensures the YP's voices remain at the heart of this study and supports the notion that these YP are to be involved in the development of support that impacts them directly. Overall, this study offers valuable contributions to the literature relating to autism and employment, the support required to improve employment outcomes

amongst this population, and the role of the EP with this population and within SEP settings.

Furthermore, the small sample size recruited for this study, from one specific SEP, enabled exploration of the research questions in more depth than a large sample size, recruited from various settings, would allow. This supported the development of a rich understanding of participant's views and experiences, resulting in a substantial contribution to the literature.

This research has also provided a platform for autistic YP to express their views, with my adoption of a role as advocate in sharing their voices to a wider audience. Considering Brittain's (2004) notion of cognitive authority, this therefore contributes by providing a space for these YP to hold this authority, directly impacting consideration of the most helpful support for this population. Dissemination of these findings will enable advocacy for these YP, with them holding the cognitive authority as to how autism and opportunities/barriers to employment are conceptualised, and therefore the nature of support developed.

Additionally, my experience of working with this population and skills in eliciting the views of all CYP throughout doctoral TEP training, and prior to beginning this course, meant I was well equipped to support and enable these YP to share their thoughts views and experiences. The numerous accommodations made and flexibility demonstrated, such as creating accessible resources for the YP to support their engagement and accessibility with the interviews, providing resources beforehand to provide preparation and thinking time, and several interpersonal skills used to develop

rapport and work towards building attuned relationships with participants, further facilitated the creation of a safe and accessible space where these YP's voices could be elicited.

The positive feedback expressed during member-checking (relating to the extracted themes and subthemes) reinforces the trustworthiness of this data. This supports the notion that my attempts to analyse data in a non-biased way were successful, allowing the findings to be representative of the participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences, a key component and value of this research.

A key strength of this research also relates to its potential for its implications on practice relating to a range of stakeholders, including SEPs and their staff, EPs and EPSs, a range of other professionals working with the autistic population, LAs, and the UK government. Identifying possible barriers to the application of research findings early within the planning process of this research (including consideration of the research relating to settings such as SEPs not commissioning EP support) and the autistic peoples' views currently in the literature relating to their desire for research that can have increased impact on their lives, enabling this to be addressed in the research design. The creation of a two-phase study design therefore increased the possible impact of this study through explicitly exploring the implications for practice with SEP staff. Considering that SEP staff are possibly the gatekeepers to autistic YPs' access to such support, this was an important consideration.

5.7.2 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. Firstly, although there are benefits to using a small sample size, recruited from one particular SEP (as identified in the 'Strengths' section above), these factors do limit the generalisability of the findings. It is also important to recognise Hall and McGarrol's (2012) claim relating to SEPs' eligibility criteria for participation, meaning that the SEP used for this study likely consisted of those who held a particular skill level, therefore meaning the views expressed by the YP may not be representative of the autistic population as a whole. It should also be considered that the views of YP highlighted through this research represent only the views of those who expressed interest in participating in this study, which could mean the participant pool is only representative of SEP students with a particular skill set and/or interests within this population (such as good communication skills and/or interest/willingness to engage with unfamiliar people; the researcher), also possibly limiting generalisability. Furthermore, information relating to the autistic participant's other diagnoses and/or learning needs was not gathered as part of this study, limiting understanding of wider issues possibly contributing to the YP's experiences.

5.8 Future Research

Although this research has made a vital contribution to understanding of autistic YP's views and experiences of their opportunities and barriers to employment, what support they find helpful on an autism-specific SEP, and what additional support they feel is required, the views of these YP remains underreported within the literature. Additional explorations are therefore required in order to construct a much deeper and broader understanding of this from a range of autistic YP. Future research in this area should

recruit more participants, across multiple SEPs from a range of LAs to enable greater generalisability, comparability and transferability of findings.

This study has also produced a foundation in this research area for many other possible branches of research. Areas to explore further could involve further exploration or development of a model of disability that is reflective autistic YPs' views and the identification/definition of a clear shared goal around this, work with SEPs to consider how such models can be implemented in practice, and also further explorations relating to how the EP's role with SEPs might be applied in practice and evaluations of this.

5.9 Dissemination of Research Findings

Dissemination is viewed as potentially one of the most integral components of the research process, as it provides opportunity for research findings to be shared widely, to improve practice and inform decision-making in various settings (Wilson et al., 2010). The findings of this study will therefore be disseminated in various ways. Firstly, research findings will be fed back to all participants who took part in this study, as well as the SEP management team for this to be distributed to all staff and students. A more accessible version of the research and the findings will be created and made available for the SEP students. An overview of this research will be presented at a thesis sharing event at my university, attended by all three cohorts of the university TEP training course, along with course tutors. This will provide opportunity to share key findings, along with implications for practice and future research, with other TEPs and course tutors/EPs. It may be possible that other TEPs in years 1 and 2 of their training and about to embark on their thesis journeys, may wish to continue research

in this area. This event therefore is also an opportunity for me to provide guidance on the future research required for interested TEPs/EPs. Research findings will also be shared with my placement EPS, during a team meeting, and plans are in motion for this to also be shared with another LA EPS in the Autumn term of 2022 (where I am due to begin my first qualified EP role). I also hope to achieve publication of this study in a peer-reviewed journal/journals targeted at the EP audience.

5.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this novel study offers a valuable and unique contribution to developing understanding of autistic YPs opportunities and barriers to employment, helpful support from an autism-specific SEP, and what further support is needed, through the collection of rich qualitative data, gathered directly from these YP themselves. Further, in line with these YP's views, this study contributes by exploring the EP's role within SEP settings and what services EPSs should be offering.

A significant finding relates to autistic YP's identification of the combination and interaction of individual and environmental factors, creating their opportunities and barriers to employment. This suggests that the MM and the SMD alone do not adequately represent this populations views on this topic. The psychological and emotional impact on this population of experiencing the world in this way, having a significant impact on this population's identities as self-perceptions as an autistic person, is also highlighted within this study. It has uncovered how this can exacerbate unemployment amongst this population due to having a considerable impact on confidence and motivation to apply for vacancies, through fear of rejection. This reinforces the importance of the development of support to address this combination

and interaction of the identified individual and environmental barriers to employment, in order to not only improve employment outcomes amongst the autistic population, but also their emotional and psychological wellbeing. These findings overall indicate that autistic YPs views relating to models of disability are most consistent with the biopsychosocial model, when compared with the MM and SMD.

Consistent with these findings, this study also found that autistic YP recognise value in employment supports that address all three aspects within the biopsychosocial model. They value support aimed at enabling them to learn adaptive skills, alongside workplace/skill support and societal adaptations, changes and acceptance, highlighting the positive impact this can have on overall psychological wellbeing and consequent confidence in participating in society through employment. It seems apparent that autistic YP feel that SEPs (designed in line with the one used for this study) can offer valuable support in line with this.

The autistic YP also identified further support and societal change they feel is required to better support the autistic population into employment. They hope for wider understanding and acceptance of autism, alongside additional support in particular areas (such as in developing their social skills). Their call for increased independence and involvement in decisions that effect them should also be noted.

This study has found that there is undoubtedly a valuable role for EPs within SEP settings, working across individual, group and organisational levels, contributing to improving support and employment outcomes for autistic YP. This study has provided insight into what this might look like in practice and provides some direction for

EPs/EPSs in developing working relationships with SEPs and supporting autistic YP aspiring to gain employment.

Findings therefore have implications for a range of stakeholders who can contribute to improving employment outcomes for this population, including SEPs, EPs, a range of other professionals, LAs, government, and more broadly, society. All have a key role, and an ethical and/or professional responsibility to, contribute to improving outcomes for autistic YP and facilitating the development of a more inclusive society and where autistic people are enabled to utilise their strengths and skills and reach their potential.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Literature Review Search Terms

Search Terms	
Search Terms	- Autism AND employment - Asperger AND employment - Supported employment in the UK OR United Kingdom - Supported Internship AND SEND - Supported Internship - Supported employment internship AND autism - Educational psychologist AND autism AND employment - Educational psychologist AND post-16 - Transition to employment AND autism - Social model of disability AND autism - Medical model AND autism - Biopsychosocial model AND autism - Autism AND barriers to employment - Autism AND reasonable adjustments - Autism AND quantitative research - Person first language OR identity first language AND autism - Educational psychologist AND autism AND employment - Educational psychologist AND post-16 - Autis* AND transition
Databases	- ProQuest - PsycInfo - PsycArticles - ProQuest 'UCL Explore' library search - Google Scholar

Appendix B - Qualification Level Information

At the time of this study, the UK Government website recognised and outlined qualifications up to Level 8 (UK Government, 2022). Find qualification levels relevant for this study stated in the table below, ranging from 'Entry Level' to 'Level 3'.

Qualification Level	Qualifications
Entry Level	- Entry level award/certificate (ELC)/diploma - Entry level English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) - Entry level essential skills - Entry level functional skills - Skills for Life
Level 1	- First certificate - GCSE - grades 3, 2, 1 or grades D, E, F, G - Level 1 award/certificate/diploma - Level 1 ESOL - Level 1 essential skills - Level 1 functional skills - Level 1 national vocational qualification (NVQ) - Music grades 1, 2 and 3
Level 2	- CSE - grade 1 - GCSE - grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or grades A*, A, B, C - Intermediate apprenticeship - Level 2 award/certificate/diploma - Level 2 ESOL - Level 2 essential skills - Level 2 functional skills - Level 2 national certificate - Level 2 national diploma - Level 2 NVQ - Music grades 4 and 5 - O level - grade A, B or C
Level 3	- A level - Access to higher education diploma - Advanced apprenticeship - Applied general - AS level - International Baccalaureate diploma - Level 3 award/certificate/diploma - Level 3 ESOL - Level 3 national certificate - Level 3 national diploma - Level 3 NVQ - Music grades 6, 7 and 8 - Tech level

Appendix C – SEP Management Information Sheet

Institute of Education

ᴧUCL

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists

SEP Information Sheet

My name is Charlotte Brenton, and I am inviting [SEP] to take in part in my research project. I am currently undertaking this research in partial fulfilment of the Professional Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

This project aims to explore the views and experiences of autistic young people (aged 18-25 years old) of their barriers to employment, the support they receive and find helpful from a Supported Employment Programme (SEP) and what additional support they feel is required. Although there seems to be a vast amount of evaluative research promoting SEPs as beneficial for this population, there are many gaps within this literature. Most strikingly, there is very little research that elicits the views and experiences from the young people themselves, resulting in their voices being underreported within the literature. The aim for this research is therefore to address this gap in the literature and provide insight into the lived experiences of these young people. Guided by the views and experiences expressed by these Young People (YP), this research will then also consider the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in supporting young people with autism within this setting, by exploring this collaboratively with the SEP staff. This aspect of the research aims to provide additional information to inform the researcher's considerations regarding the EPs role with post-16 young people and within post-16 settings; a new way of working for EPs and also an area within the research which is currently lacking.

This research will hopefully contribute to the development of the current methods in which young adults with autism are supported into employment, and provide guidance for EPs as to how they can support these young people within a SEP setting.

Who is carrying out the research?
Charlotte Brenton will be carrying out this research under the supervision of Dr Emily Midouhas (a Developmental Psychologist and Associate Professor at UCL Institute of Education) and Dr Chris Clarke (Educational Psychologist and Professional Tutor at UCL Institute of Education). This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

What will happen if I agree to the SEP to taking part?
This research study will consist of two phases.

Phase one will involve one-to-one informal video (or telephone if the young people prefer) conversations between the researcher and the young person. A trusted adult

can accompany the young person if the young person wishes. The young person will be asked a few informal questions relating to their experiences of their barriers to employment, the support they have found useful during the SEP and what additional support they feel is required. All young people will be provided with a copy of these questions in advance, in an accessible format. These interviews will be video and/or voice recorded by the researcher. However, once these interviews have been transcribed, these transcriptions will be anonymised, and recordings will be deleted.

Phase two will consist of a focus group with SEP staff. Participants will be asked to complete a short activity prior to the focus group (reading a short amount of relevant information provided by the researcher). The researcher will provide anonymised feedback to the focus group regarding the key points shared by the young people during phase one. This information will provide the basis of discussions regarding the potential role of EP's within a SEP setting. This focus group will also be video and/or voice recorded by the researcher, with these recordings deleted once the focus group discussions have been transcribed and anonymised.

A summary of the research findings will be made available for all young people who participate, their parents and the employment programme staff following completion.

Do the students/staff have to take part?
It is entirely up to the students/staff whether or not they choose to take part. If someone does choose to participate and later decides they would like to withdraw, they can do so at any point during the research, without giving reason, and their data will not be used.

Data Protection Privacy Notice
The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data.

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 provided we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible. The Research Privacy Notice can be read by clicking here.

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

If you have any further questions before making this decision, you can contact the researcher via the contact details below.

If you are interested in [SEP] participating in this study, please contact the researcher via email, attaching the informed consent form, at:
████████████████

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

Charlotte Brenton - Researcher   Dr Emily Midouhas – Research Supervisor
████████████████   ████████████████
charlotte.brenton.19@ucl.ac.uk   emily.midouhas@ucl.ac.uk

Appendix D – SEP Management Informed Consent Form
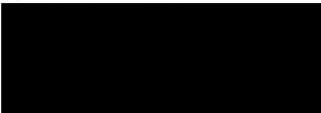
Institute of Education

🏛 **UCL**

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists
SEP Informed Consent Form

	Yes	No
1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet about the research.	☐	☐
2. I confirm my consent for students and staff at [SEP] to be invited to participate in this research.	☐	☐
3. I agree, with the participants (and the young people's parental consent), participants can be video and/or voice recorded during the interviews/focus group.	☐	☐
4. I understand that if any of the participants words are used in reports or presentations they will be anonymised.	☐	☐
5. I understand that participants can withdraw from the study at any time, and that if they choose to do this, any data they have contributed will not be used.	☐	☐
6. In the unlikely occurrence of concerns being raised by any participant during the study, the researcher will follow the appropriate procedures, in line with [SEP] expectations.	☐	☐
7. I understand that participants (or the young peoples' parents) can contact Charlotte Brenton or Dr Emily Midouhas at any time and request for their data to be removed from the project database.	☐	☐
8. I understand that the anonymised results may be shared in research publications and/or presentations.	☐	☐
9. I can contact UCL data protection (via email) if I have any concerns about how the students' personal information is used. I have read the data privacy information on the information sheet.	☐	☐

Name _____ Position:_____ Date _____

Charlotte Brenton - Researcher

Dr Emily Midouhas – Research Supervisor

Appendix E – YP Information Sheet

Institute of Education

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists

Participant Information Sheet

Hello! 😊

My name is Charlotte.

I study at UCL Institute of Education which is a university in Central London

The course I am studying is called a Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology.

As part of this course, I have to complete some of my own research

For my research, I would like to find out more about what it is like to be autistic and be part of a supported employment programme, like

[SEP]...

So, I would like to invite you to participate 😊

I would like to find out what it's like to be a student with [SEP]

If it's ok, I would like to have a chat with you using Zoom! 😊 (or on the phone if you would prefer)

Don't worry, I will send you a copy of exactly what I will be asking you before our chat so that you know what to expect.

I will record these chats to help me remember everything that we talk about.

Once we finish talking, I will listen to the recordings again so that I can write down everything that we said, like a script. I will then delete the recordings.

I will not write your name in the 'script' so that it is *anonymous*.

This means the script will **not** include your name, or any information that may allow others to identify you.

I will then use this information to think about what more can be done to help autistic young people who hope to get a job.

I will meet with some of the staff from [SEP] so that we can come up with some great ideas together!

Once this is all done, I will write my research project for university.

I will also provide a summary of my findings for you if you would like to find out about the results of the study 😊

It would be great if you would like to take part. You could be helping others to understand what it is like to have autism and take part in an employment programme 😊

This could help organisations, (like [SEP] to help *more* people with autism get into work! It can also help professionals to understand how to best support autistic people!

However, you do not have to take part if you do not want to.

If you decide you would like to take part, but change your mind, this is OK too!

If this happens, I will delete any information I have of you and I will not use it for my research project 😊

This Research Project has been approved by UCL IOE Research Committee. Your personal data will be used as it is required by the research project and will be anonymised where we are able to do this. The Research Privacy Notice can be read by clicking here

If you are worried about how your personal data is being used, or would like to contact The UCL Data Protection Office about your rights, you can contact them on:

Any Questions? 😊 Email me on:

[REDACTED]

Or my supervisor, Dr Emily Midouhas, on:

[REDACTED]

Thank You

If you would like to take part, that's great!

Please tell me by sending me an email, with the completed **consent form** attached, by:

[DATE]

If you need any help with this, please do just email me or ask a member of staff from [SEP] 😊

Thank you for reading

Appendix F – YP Informed Consent Form

Institute of Education

▥UCL

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists
Participant Informed Consent Form

Please read this informed consent form. If you are happy to take part, please complete this form and send this to Charlotte in an email, to:

_____ by [DATE]

|	Yes	No
1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet.	☐	☐
2. I agree to be video and/or voice recorded during the interview.	☐	☐
3. I understand that if any of my words are used for the research project they will be anonymised.	☐	☐
4. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any of my information will not be used.	☐	☐
5. I understand that I can contact Charlotte Brenton or Dr Emily Midouhas at any time to ask her to delete my information.	☐	☐
6. I understand that the anonymised information may be shared in research publications and/or presentations.	☐	☐
7. I, or my parents, can contact UCL data protection (via email) if I have any concerns about how my personal information is used. I have read the data privacy information on the information sheet.	☐	☐

Thank you! 😊

Name _____ Signed _____ Date _____

Charlotte Brenton - Researcher
UCL Institute of Education
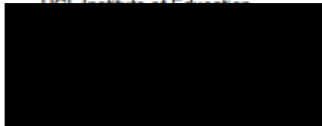
Dr Emily Midouhas – Research Supervisor
UCL Institute of Education
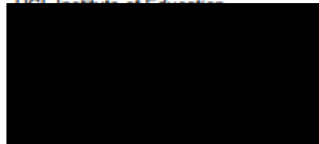
Appendix G – Researcher Interview Schedule (Phase 1)

Researcher Interview Schedule – Phase 1

Briefing

1. Before we start, just to say thank you for participating. It is great that you would like to be involved and I am looking forward to hearing what you would like to say.
2. I also wanted to remind you that it is very important for you to understand exactly what I say. So please feel free to let me know if anything I have said doesn't make sense to you or if you want me to repeat anything.
3. Presentation – may be good to get this and have up throughout – do you want a few minutes to find it and set your screen up/or I share screen
4. Also, there are no right or wrong answers to my questions! I want to hear about *your* thoughts and opinions, so whatever you think… I would love to hear about.
5. I also want to remind you that I will be recording the interviews. This is just so that I can remember everything we speak about and I will delete the recordings once I have this all written down (and remember, I won't write your name in this at all!).
6. You can stop the interview at any time or have a break if you would like one, and you do not need to give any reason for this (organise stop/break signal if needed, e.g. hold up pen, say 'stop'/'break', wave arm etc).. (whatever feels most accessible for YP).
7. And remember, you can have a trusted adult in the room with you if you would like. Would you like someone to join you or are you happy to meet with me on your own? If you change your mind this is ok! Just let me know. Again – agree how they can communicate this.

Icebreaker/Rapport Building Activity

Game: (introduce/explain - two of these are true, and one is not true – what do you think?)
1. I have a pet cat called Misty
2. My favourite drink is a cup of tea
3. In my spare time, I like to watch the Rugby

Section 1 – Autism
- What does the word 'autism' mean to you?
- How would you describe Autism to someone who did not know what it was?
- What are the positives to being autistic? Does it mean you have any particular skills?
- What are the challenges that an autistic person may face? What might an autistic person find more difficult/easier than someone who is not autistic?

Section 2 – Autism and Employment

1. How has being autistic affected you finding/keeping a job?
- If having difficulty, refer to traits they identified above: Do any of these things make it harder/easier for an autistic person to get/keep a job? Why?

Section 3 – Supported Employment Programme

2. **Why did you decide to join [SEP]?**
   - Who helped you to decide to take part?
   - What were your hopes for the programme?
   - Why is it important to you to have a job?

3. **Before you started [SEP], did you feel able to get a job?**
   (on a scale 0-10 - 0 = not at all, 10 = yes, completely!).
   - Why did give the rating X?
   - Why did you give the rating X and not 0?
   - Why didn't you give the rating 10?
   - You mentioned during question 2 that some barriers for autistic people may relate to… were you experiencing any of these difficulties yourself? What happened?

4. **What part of [SEP] has been the most helpful?**
   I have given you some ideas to help:

Work placements	Job Coach Support and Targets	Career Advisor	Job Club
Functional Skills Classes	Employability Skills Classes	Social Events	Travel Training

   - Is there anything else that you have found helpful at [SEP]?
   - What are your top 3?
   - Why? What have you learnt from this/how did it help?
   - Why? What did you enjoy about this?
   - Can you think of any examples when this has been particularly helpful? Why?
   - Has X (identified by participant) helped you to overcome [barriers identified in question 4]? How/Why?
   - How could this be improved? (pace, amount, specific aspects…)

5. **What part of [SEP] has been the least helpful?**
   Here are the same ideas to help you if you need them:

Work placements	Job Coach Support and Targets	Career Advisor	Job Club
Functional Skills Classes	Employability Skills Classes	Social Events	Travel Training

   - Is there anything else at [SEP] that you haven't found very helpful?
   - What are your bottom 3?
   - Why? What did you find unhelpful? – What could be done differently to make this more helpful?
   - Did you have different expectations of what this would involve? What/why? What would you have hoped to learn from that that you did not?

6. **You are about to finish [SEP] soon, do you feel able to get a job now?**
   (on a scale 0-10 . 0 = not at all, 10 = yes, completely!).
   - Why did you give the rating Y?
   - How has [SEP] helped your rating to move from X to Y? (space between first score and second score).

- You mentioned you had experienced barriers such as … in question 4. Has the programme helped you to learn any skills to overcome these barriers? What? How? Why has this been helpful?
- What skills/experience do you feel like you still need (space between Y and 10)
- What further support do you feel like you still need? (space between Y and 10) – from who? How?

7. **What could [SEP] do differently to help autistic people feel more able to get a job?**
   - Are there any specific areas you would like more support in?

8. **What else could be done to help more autistic people get a job (if they want one)?**
   - What would you like other people to do to help make this easier for you/autistic people? Why would this make it easier? Why is this important to you/autistic people?
   - What could you/autistic people do to make this easier for yourself/them? Why would this make it easier to get a job? Why is this important to you/autistic people?

9. **If someone was thinking about joining [SEP], what would you say to them?**
   - Would you tell them to join? Why?
   - What would you tell them the employment programme helps with?
   - What would you tell them the employment programme needs to be better at?
   - What advice would you give them?

Section 4 – Summarising and Final Prompts
So, is it right that you think…? (summarise key points)
   Anything else?
   - Is there anything else you wanted to tell me about [SEP] that you haven't felt able to yet?
   - How could [SEP] be better suited for autistic people?
   - Is there anything you would have liked me to ask you about [SEP] and the support you receive?
   - Is there anything else you think it would be useful for me to know about [SEP] and how it helps autistic people?

Section 5 – Finish and Debrief
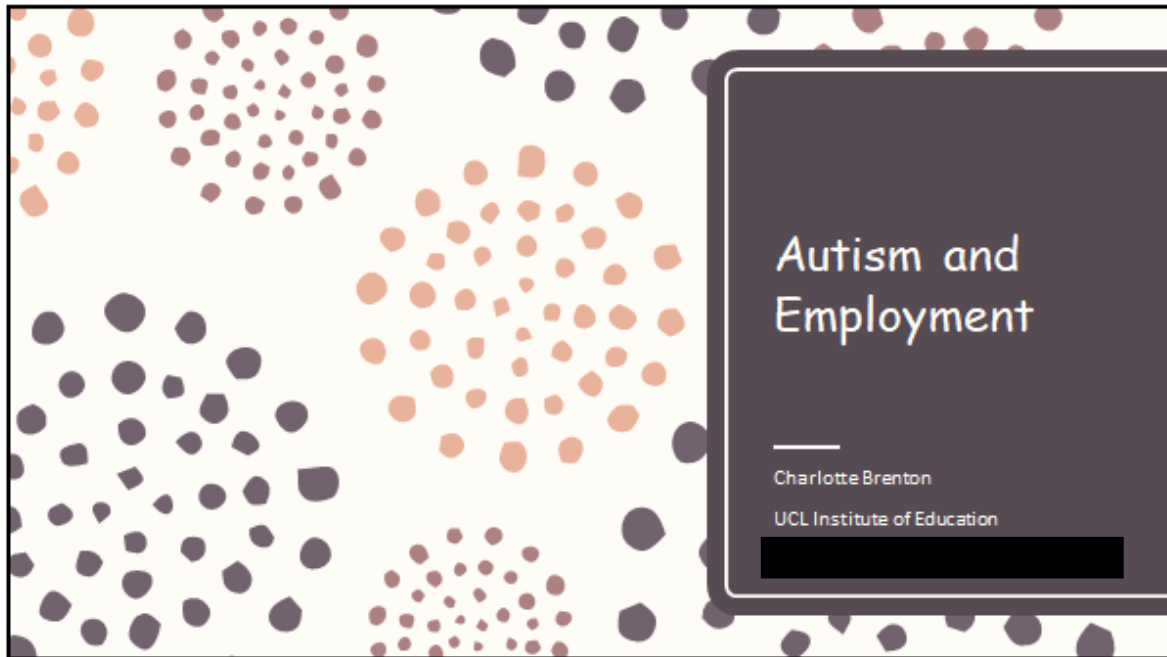
Thank you so much for taking part!

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

If you think of anything after our chat today, you can email me (email address is on the PowerPoint, the information sheets and the informed consent form – read out if needed/allow time to write down).

Next steps - Get/confirm email address from when consent form was returned (if want findings info and/or the accessible version of final report, or can sent to [SEP manager] if they prefer)
Thank you for taking part. I am hoping that my research will help more people understand what support autistic people feel is needed to help get into employment. Chatting to you today has been so helpful!
Enjoy the rest of your day

Appendix H – YP/Participant Interview Schedule (Phase 1)

1

2

Activity

We are going to play a quick game

I am going to tell you **3** things about myself.
Two of them will be *true* and one will be *not true.* It's your job to guess which is which!

This is just for fun, before we get started 😎

Then, it's your turn!

3

---

① 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 10

1. Tell me about your autism...

Overwhelm   Caring   **Different**
Kind   Awkward   Shy   Scared
Isolated   Challenge   Gift
Happy   **Thoughtful**   Strength
Lonely   Interesting   Creative
Love
Melt-down   Sad   Anger   Sociable
Funny
Imaginative   Difficult   Unique

4

1 ②3 4 5
6 7 8 9 10

2. How has being autistic affected you finding/keeping a job?

- Being autistic can make it harder to *find* a job because...
- Being autistic can make it harder to *keep* a job because...

- Being autistic can make it easier to *find* a job because...
- Being autistic can make it easier to *keep* a job because...

5

---

1 2 ③4 5
6 7 8 9 10

3. Why did you decide to join [SEP ?

I hoped it would help with...

I thought I would learn about...

I wanted to be better at...

... wanted me to do it because...

I was worried about...

I wanted to feel more confident to...

6

1 2 3 ④ 5
6 7 8 9 10

4. Before you started [SEP]', did you feel able to get a job?

```
0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
```

😦   😐   😁

Not at all   Yes, Completely!

7

---

1 2 3 4 ⑤
6 7 8 9 10

5. What part of [SEP]' has been the _most_ helpful?

Here are some ideas ↘

Work placements	Job Coach Support and Targets	Career Advisor	Job Club
Functional Skills Classes	Employability Skills Classes	Social Events	Travel Training

Why?
How has this helped you?

What did you learn?
Any examples?

8

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 10 (6 circled)

6. What part of [SEP] has been the _least_ helpful?

Here are some ideas

Work placements	Job Coach Support and Targets	Career Advisor	Job Club
Functional Skills Classes	Employability Skills Classes	Social Events	Travel Training

Why?

What would be more helpful?

What should have been done differently?

What would you change?

9

---

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 10 (7 circled)

7. You are about to finish [SEP] soon... do you feel able to get a job now?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all

Yes, Completely!

10

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 (8) 9 10

8. What could [SEP] do differently to help autistic people feel more able to get a job?

[SEP] could...

[SEP] could help autistic people more if...

I think should change how they... [SEP]

I would feel more able to get a job if...

If I could tell [SEP] to change one thing it would be...

11

---

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 (9) 10

9. What else could be done to help more autistic people get a job (if they want one!)?

Other people could help me by...

I could help myself by...

12

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 (10)

10. If someone was thinking about joining [SEP] **what would you say to them?**

It's great because...

I am now better at...

[SEP] has helped me with...

I wish they helped more with...

I have enjoyed...

I still need help with...

The best thing about [SEP] **is...**

I have not enjoyed...

13

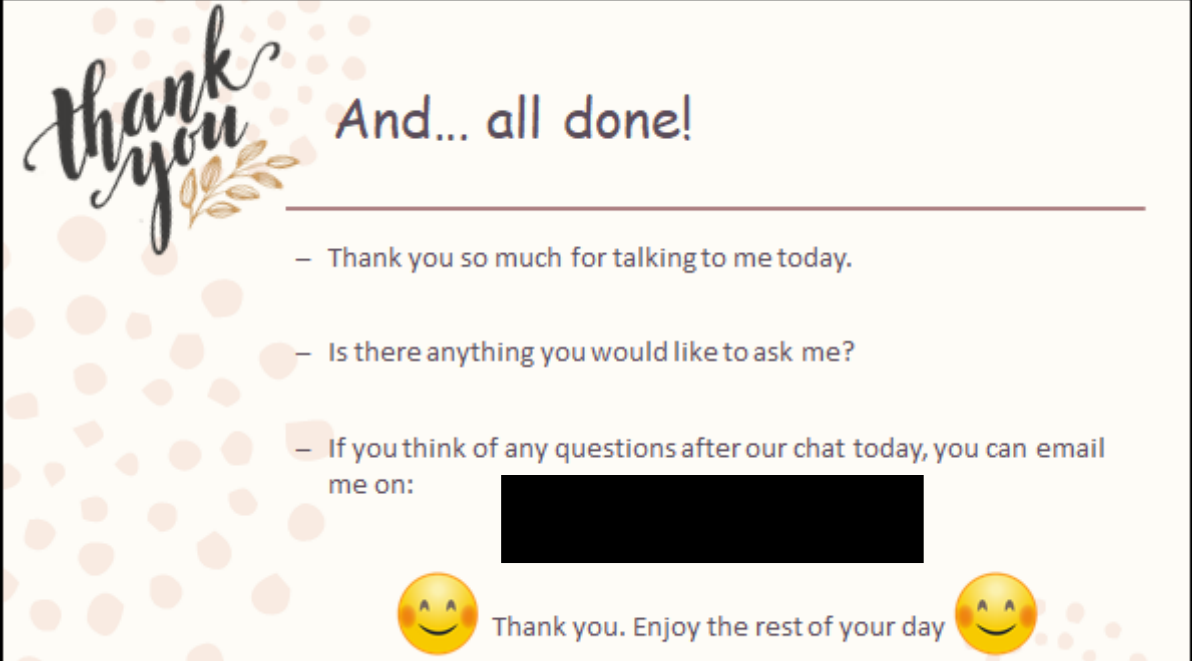## Anything else?

– Is there anything else you wanted to tell me about [SEP] that you haven't felt able to yet?

– How could [SEP] be better suited for autistic people?

– Is there anything you would have liked me to ask you about regarding [SEP] and the support you receive?

– Is there anything else you think it would be useful for me to know about how [SEP] helps autistic people?

14

And... all done!

— Thank you so much for talking to me today.

— Is there anything you would like to ask me?

— If you think of any questions after our chat today, you can email me on: █████████████████

Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your day

15

Appendix I – SEP Staff Information Sheet

Institute of Education

🏛 **UCL**

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists
Staff Information Sheet

My name is Charlotte Brenton, and I am inviting you to take in part in my research project. I am currently undertaking this research in partial fulfilment of the Professional Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

This project aims to explore the views and experiences of autistic young people (aged 18-25 years old) of their barriers to employment, the support they receive and find helpful from a Supported Employment Programme (SEP) and what additional support they feel is required. Although there seems to be a vast amount of evaluative research promoting SEPs as beneficial for this population, there are many gaps within this literature. Most strikingly, there is very little research that elicits the views and experiences from the young people themselves, resulting in their voices being underreported within the literature. The aim for this research is therefore to address this gap in the literature and provide insight into the lived experiences of these young people. Guided by the views and experiences expressed by these Young People (YP), this research will then also consider the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in supporting young people with autism within this setting, by exploring this collaboratively with the SEP staff. This aspect of the research aims to provide additional information to inform the researcher's considerations regarding the EPs role with post-16 young people and within post-16 settings; a new way of working for EPs and also an area within the research which is currently lacking.

This research will hopefully contribute to the development of the current methods in which young adults with autism are supported into employment, and provide guidance for EPs as to how they can support these young people within a SEP setting.

Who is carrying out the research?
Charlotte Brenton will be carrying out this research under the supervision of Dr Emily Midouhas (a Developmental Psychologist and Associate Professor at UCL Institute of Education) and Dr Chris Clarke (Educational Psychologist and Professional Tutor at UCL Institute of Education). This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

What will happen if I choose to take part?
This research study will consist of two phases. You are being invited to participate in **phase two**.

Phase one will involve one-to-one informal video (or telephone if the young people prefer) conversations between the researcher and the young person. A trusted adult can accompany the young person if the young person wishes. The young person will

be asked a few informal questions relating to their experiences of their barriers to employment, the support they have found useful during the SEP and what additional support they feel is required. All young people will be provided with a copy of these questions in advance, in an accessible format. These interviews will be video and/or voice recorded by the researcher. However, once these interviews have been transcribed, these transcriptions will be anonymised, and recordings will be deleted.

Phase two will consist of a focus group with SEP staff. Participants will be asked to complete a short activity prior to the focus group (reading a short amount of relevant information provided by the researcher). The researcher will provide anonymised feedback to the focus group regarding the key points shared by the young people during phase one. This information will provide the basis of discussions regarding the potential role of EP's within a SEP setting. This focus group will also be video and/or voice recorded by the researcher, with these recordings deleted once the focus group discussions have been transcribed and anonymised.

A summary of the research findings will be made available for all young people who participate, their parents and the employment programme staff following completion.

Do I have to take part?
It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. If you do choose to participate and later change your mind, you can withdraw at any point during the research, without giving reason, and your data will not be used.

Data Protection Privacy Notice
The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of 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. The Research Privacy Notice can be read by clicking here.

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 ███████ ████████████.

If you have any further questions before you decide if you would like to take part or not, you can contact the researcher via the contact details below.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact the researcher via email, attaching the informed consent form, at:
████████████████████████

By [DATE]

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

Charlotte Brenton – Researcher   Dr Emily Midouhas – Research Supervisor
UCL Institute of Education   UCL Institute of Education

Appendix J – SEP Staff Informed Consent Form

Institute of Education

🏛 **UCL**

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists
Staff Informed Consent Form

	Yes	No
If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form and return to Charlotte Brenton at the email address below.		
1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet about the research.	☐	☐
2. I agree to be video and/or voice recorded during the focus group.	☐	☐
3. I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations they will be anonymised.	☐	☐
4. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used.	☐	☐
5. I understand that I can contact Charlotte Brenton or Dr Emily Midouhas at any time and request for my data to be removed from the project database.	☐	☐
6. I understand that the anonymised results may be shared in research publications and/or presentations.	☐	☐
7. I can contact UCL data protection (via email) if I have any concerns about how my personal information is used. I have read the data privacy information on the information sheet.	☐	☐

Name _____ Signed _____ Date _____

Charlotte Brenton - Researcher

Dr Emily Midouhas – Research Supervisor

Appendix K – Focus Group Pre-Reading Resource (Phase 2)

Below is the information available on the SEP's Local Authority website, relating to their local Educational Psychology Service and the role of the Educational Psychologist. Participants were provided with a link to this webpage, where this information was presented in an accessible and interactive (drop down menus etc.) way. The information has been anonymised and outlined below:

Educational Psychology Service

[Borough] Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is part of the Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) team in [Borough]'s Council's Children's and Adults' Services. The Service has strong links with other Local Authority services and works closely with schools, post-16 provision and early years settings to promote the educational opportunities of vulnerable pupils including those with special educational needs and disabilities, children who are looked after by the local authority and those at risk of significant harm.

The EPS is committed to improving teaching and learning for all children and young people, especially those with additional needs. The service also promotes high quality care and education in the range of provision accessed by babies, children and young people aged 0-25 years in [Borough] and works to ensure that every setting is good or outstanding.

Service Structure and Development

The Educational Psychology Service consists of two teams of educational psychologists (EPs) and SEND inclusion practitioners (SENDIPs) led by a principal educational psychologist who reports to the head of SEND. Each team is managed and supervised by a senior educational psychologist. The teams are co-located with the Family Early Help Service and SEND teams in locality bases across [Borough].

All [Borough]'s educational psychologists:

- Have undertaken postgraduate professional training in educational psychology to either masters or doctoral level and are employed by [Borough] Council.
- Are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and bound by their standards of conduct, performance, ethics and proficiency, as published by the HCPC
- Are required to undertake continuing professional development activities and maintain a log of evidence.
- Are appointed by interview and have been subject to safeguarding (enhanced DBS) and medical checks.

The teams provide a direct service to all maintained schools and settings in [Borough], and to non-maintained schools and settings who purchase educational psychology services from [Borough] EPS.

All schools maintained by [Borough] are allocated a named 'link EP', whose input to an individual academy, school or setting is determined by the setting's level of need. The link EP provides consultation, assessment and support to establish evidence-informed interventions at system, group and individual levels.

Non-maintained schools and settings can purchase educational psychology services from [Borough], either via a one-year service level agreement agreed in advance or at a higher daily rate, purchased as required where service capacity allows.

The educational psychologists and SENDIPs also support early years providers, children's centres and other settings as required, particularly when pupils transition from one setting to another.

Who is the service for?

The service is for Children & Young People 0-25, who live in [Borough] or attend [Borough] schools.

The EPS works with families, schools, post-16 provision and early years settings to explore issues and resolve problems that can affect learning and well-being. The EPS also provides additional support to settings in the event of a potentially traumatic event.

Criteria for access to the Service

[Borough]'s EPS follows the Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (January 2015).

The service is free at the point of delivery to children and parents.

Educational Psychology involvement is sought by a school or setting where they have identified pupils making less than expected progress given their age and individual circumstance.

Usually the school and family will have worked closely together to remove barriers to learning and put effective provision in place but where a pupil continues to make less than expected progress, despite evidence-based support and interventions matched to the pupil's area of need, the school can consider involving specialists, including the educational psychologist.

Schools can choose to involve the educational psychologist at any point to advise them on early identification of SEN and effective support and intervention. Parents should always be involved in any decision to involve the educational psychologist and written parental consent will be required.

SENDIP involvement can be requested by the school via their link EP or early years setting, where support is required for planning and preparation for the transitions between phases of education.

Accessibility of This Service

[Borough]'s Educational Psychology Services are usually accessed in schools and other educational settings, but in some circumstances a home visit can be arranged, or a meeting held at council offices. Interpreting and translation services can be arranged where needed.

How is This Provided?

Educational Psychologists apply their psychological skills and knowledge to carry out statutory and non-statutory work relating to the SEND Code of Practice and provide advice about the psychological aspects of learning and child development, social, emotional and mental health and behaviour.

They also advise on psychological interventions that focus on narrowing gaps in attainment and improving academic progress, developing particular skills or addressing social, emotional and mental health needs. This may be done:

> *At the individual level* – e.g. providing support with or attendance at Team Around the Child/Family (TAC/TAF) meetings, consultation about planning and writing delivery plans/individual education plans, consultation with parents and school staff about issues arising from individual interventions, consultation on strategies for working with individual learners, and individual assessment linked to statutory work;

> *At the group and class level* – e.g. joint problem-solving and support for groups of staff, parent workshops, and work with groups of pupils; and,

> *At the strategic, systems and organisational level* – e.g. policy development, research, in-service training and other developmental work and whole school teaching and learning

How Can I Access This Service?

Families can talk to their child's class teacher, SENCo, Inclusion Manager or Head Teacher about their concerns in the first instance. A joint decision to involve the educational psychologist would normally arise out of the school's Assess-Plan-Do-Review cycle of SEN support in school.

Parents have a specific right to ask the local authority to conduct an education, health and care needs assessment for a child or young person aged 0 to 25. If the local authority agrees, an educational psychologist will provide psychological advice about the pupil's special educational needs as part of that assessment.

How is This Service Funded?

[Borough]'s Educational Psychology Services is part of the Council's Education department and sits within the SEND team. It is free to parents, children and young people at the point of access.

Do You Need to Pay for This Service?

All schools maintained by [Borough] are allocated a named 'link EP', whose input to an individual academy, school or setting is determined by the setting's level of need. The link EP provides consultation, assessment and support to establish evidence-informed interventions at system, group and individual levels.
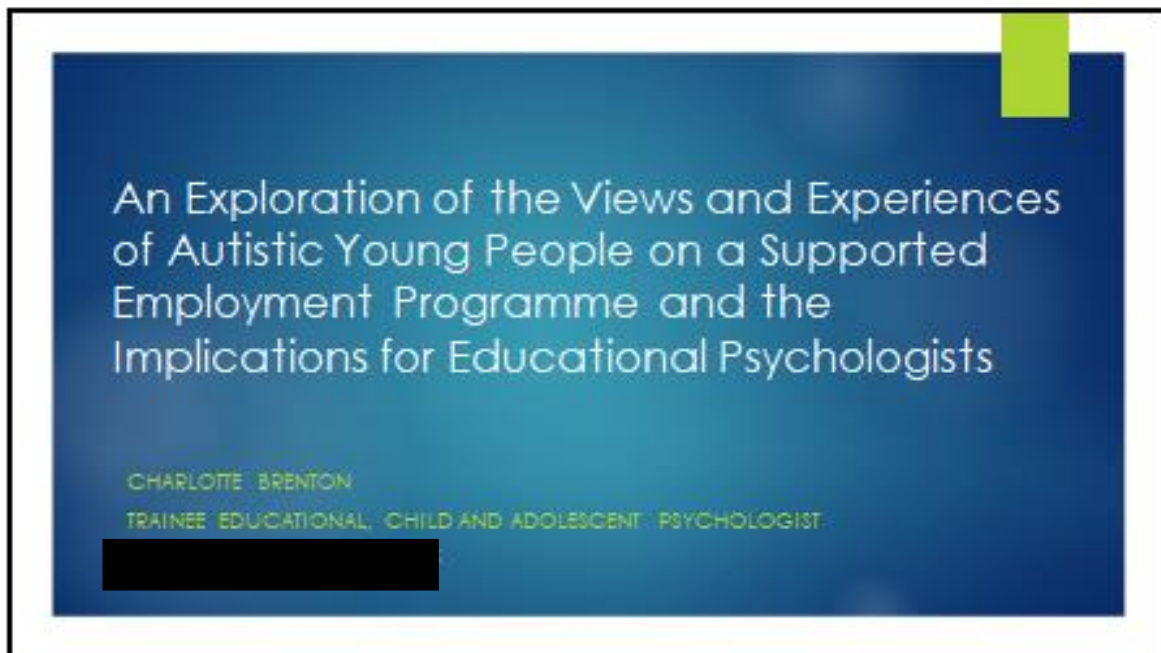
Non-maintained schools and settings can purchase educational psychology services from [Borough], either via a one-year service level agreement agreed in advance or at a higher daily rate, purchased as required where service capacity allows.

Confidentiality and Impartiality

[Borough]'s Educational Psychologists:

- Maintain confidential reports and documents in a secure location in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2003.
- Are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and bound by their standards of conduct, performance, ethics and proficiency, as published by the HCPC.
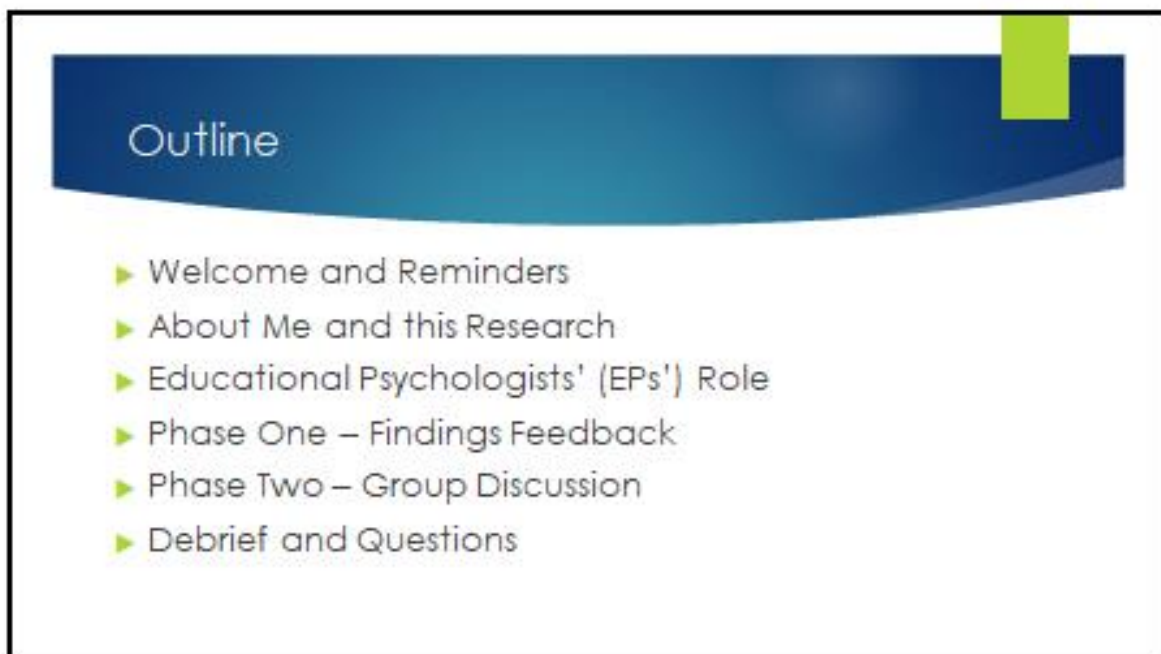- Adhere to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2004).

Appendix L – Focus Group Schedule (Phase 2)

Welcome and Reminders

▶ Thank you!

▶ Recording

▶ Confidentiality and Anonymity

▶ Cameras and Microphones

▶ Right to Withdraw

3

About Me and this Research

▶ Third Year Trainee Educational Psychologist and Doctorate Student

▶ Thesis: *An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists*
  1. **RQ1:** What are autistic YP's views and experiences of their opportunities for, and barriers to, employment?
  2. **RQ2:** What support provided by an autism-specific SEP do autistic YP find helpful?
  3. **RQ3:** What additional support do autistic YP feel they need to feel better supported into employment?
  4. **RQ4:** What is the potential role of EPs in supporting autistic YP within SEP settings, and what services should EPS' be offering?

▶ Rationale for Research Area
  ▶ Personal interest
  ▶ 'Cliff' edge' post-16/18 and unemployment rates for autistic population
  ▶ Young peoples' voices under-represented in research
  ▶ Extension to EP role since EHCPs (now 0-25 years)

4

Educational Psychologists' (EPs') Role

- 3-Year Professional Doctorate
  - Entry criteria – Accredited psychology degree, at least 1 year's experience
  - university teaching, professional placement, research.
- Educational Psychology Services
  - A team within every Local Authority
  - Services for CYP with SEN between 0-25 years old.
    - Statutory work (EHCPs)
    - Many offer 'traded services'
  - Three levels: Individual, group, and organizational
  - Five core functions: consultation, assessment, intervention, training, research

5

Any Questions?

6

Current Research: Theme 1

Theme 1
Conceptualising Autism: The Combination and Interaction of Individual and Environmental Factors

- The Role of Appropriate and Relevant Support
- Positive and Unique Skills and Qualities
- Cognitive and Language skill Difficulties
- Stereotyping and Discrimination
- Others' Level of Autism Awareness and Understanding
- Difficulties Understanding, Communicating and Regulating Emotions
- Social Awareness and Communication Difficulties
- Sensory Needs

Current Research: Theme 2

Theme 2
Autism Identities: Juxtaposed Feelings

- Feelings of Loneliness and Isolation
- Uncertainties around Future
- Ownership and Pride
- Feeling Stigmatized and Rejected
- Low Confidence and Self-Esteem

Current Research: Theme 3

Theme 3
The Value of Practical Supports Alongside Understanding, Acceptance and Inclusion

- Building Connections and Developing Relationships
- Other's Advocating to Widen Autism Awareness and Understanding
- Community Acceptance and Understanding of Autism
- Building 'Employability' – Qualifications and Experience
- Practical and Applied Employment Learning Opportunities
- Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing Improvements

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Current Research: Theme 4

Theme 4
Hopes for Increased Independence, Understanding, Acceptance and Support

- Increasing Independence and Life-Skills
- Wider Autism Understanding and Acceptance
- More Application of Person-Centred Approaches
- SEPs More Widely Available and Accessible
- Further Social Skill Support
- Self-Advocacy Skills and Platforms
- Expanding Knowledge of Legal Rights and Available Support

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Appendix M – Phase 1 Transcript Extract – Interview

R: can you think of any examples?	
P5: um... probably at home yeah so when my mum asks me like... asks me information... asks me information to do something because it can be quite a lot of information	Processing/overload of information
R: Mhm	
P5: and I have to sometimes ask her to repeat it again because I thought I understand it but then... but then I realise it can be easy to forget um... so I kind of have to ask her to repeat information to hopefully to process in my brain... well actually one process at a time actually so I have time actually to understand the words.	Processing difficulties Requesting information being repeated is helpful Receptive Language
R: Mhm	
P5: um... well with others um I think... it depends on what people are like... because you have to read their expressions... um... their body language to see what they're like...	Social communication difficulties – reading body language
R: Mhm... so if I said to you that I did not know what autism was... how would you explain it to me?	
P5: its someone like um... who struggles to socialise in larger groups... or doesn't show emotions to another person... because they don't want to um...because they can't express how they feel...because they might not understand how they feel... um... sometimes they... the way they process to other people can be quite challenging and it can overwhelm someone if it's too much information	Social difficulties Difficulties communicating emotions Difficulties understanding emotions Processing information
R: yeah	
P5: and also um sometimes that person can feel quite isolated	Can feel isolated
R: ok can you tell me more about that?	
P5: um... what I mean is like some people don't have anyone to talk to... or might not understand their feelings like what they feel.. so what happens is that person can feel kind of isolated... um... like um... it can be quite... the person can get stressed out.	Not having others to talk to – relationships? Not understanding own feelings can cause feelings of isolation
R: Mhm...	

P5: um... yeah autism is um... there's positives... um... actually autism people can be smart... um no um... if there is a specific subject um... whatever subject they are interested in they will always put their effort in...they will always be passionate about it	Positives to being autistic Positive skills and qualities
R: Ok thank you... anything else?	
P5: I would say um... mainly um... we struggle to read body language or expression... so what people say about you...because that's what my mum told me at the meeting... so I sometimes don't read like their expressions and their body language... because they might tease towards you or talk about you or... judge you... uh... um... it can feel quite scared... some people can feel quite scared of what to say or um... what to say to another person and how they react...because you always have to have that feeling... or... that worry and that stress.	Social communication difficulties – reading body language and expressions Impact of social communication difficulties on feelings and emotions
R: anything else?	
P5: don't think so	
R: ok so let's have a look at question two... so I would like know now how has autism effected you finding or keeping a job?	
P5: um... I would say being autistic can be harder to keep a job well obviously you know ... well... autism being an autistic person... it can make it harder to find a job but... because... especially employees they wont give a person a chance... because they look at this one specific title or word... autistic people... and straight away its just like... just... pushing away... like its nothing... so it can make it really difficult on them because... it is really hard because when you don't find a job or when you get rejected... it does make them feel... disappointment in themselves... because they want to be given a chance... yeah.	Employers not giving autistic people a chance – discrimination? Feelings of rejection Impact of rejection of wellbeing

Appendix N – Phase 2 Transcript Extract – Focus Group

P7: um… I think possibly around um… wellbeing… obviously we know that… um… I think it's like… 80% of autistic people will have… additional mental health conditions or issues anyway… that… the majority of the people that we… um… support… will have mental health issues… um… and obviously access to services is… you know… ridiculous waiting lists and everything like that… so maybe having a psychologist on site… or someone that… you know… that we can go to whether its for organizational support or individual support… would really help with that… to give them some access… that might be… a nine month waiting list usually…	Increasing access to MH services for YP Individual support for YP Organisational support
R: Mhm… and what might that look like so you said about organisational and possibly individual support… could you tell me more about that?	
P7: I guess… organizational support would be… kind of… upskilling of our staff… to give them those like… strategies and like… you know ways of kind of um… supporting our students that have these specific… um… issues whatever it may be… also things like the cognitive support as well like… we have students that come to us… obviously they're like… they all have a diagnosis of autism… but the majority of them have an additional diagnosis of dyslexia or dyspraxia or anything like that but we… we don't… I don't want to speak for everyone but I don't think that we… feel confident in those other areas… whereas we may feel really confident with autism… um… but need those like… we need to be upskilled in those sort of areas as well… and I guess individual support… um… I mean… I don't know how that would look but um.. I think the introduction of having SALT… individual SALT this year… we've seen that you know… trends are coming up where… I think they see that this is like a therapist… and they start opening up… and they start talking about things… so we get lots of… safeguarding referral stuff from our SALT because they think they're in therapy… and they wouldn't necessarily talk to their job coach or tutor about that…	Upskilling SEP staff Broadening knowledge and understanding of how to support other SEN Individual MH support for YP
P5: but I also think like um… with um… individual level that would be… for people like… um… [student] um so like… he struggles quite a lot and that impacts on his learning quite a bit… his mental health does… um so… any help around that to… um… well… you know… he's been with us for so long and it would really… then progress in terms of education is very little… even though there's so much potential… but	Individual support around learning

we… really like I don't know like what else we can do… so that help where we could… I think I've hit… a wall at the moment	Upskilling staff to support learning needs
P1: and its like things like working with employers around mental health	Work with employers
P5: yeah, yeah	
P1: that were not specialised in… although we do the autism training but in actual fact they probably also need…	
P5: we've had a lot of mental health training its just not in depth enough I guess… for um…	
P3: or it tends to be very general… I think like… an EP wouldn't be necessarily mental health specific but they would have an area of understanding of like mental health and autism… which is what we tend to find that… you know… there's a lot of mental health stuff and then there's autism stuff but their often not very um… joined… for specific… like targeted interventions for… autistic young people that incorporate mental health is quite a hard thing to find… I think [CEO] has touched on trying to find support in that area and I don't know if that would maybe fit in with an EP role specifically but that would be a possible area… I don't know…	Bespoke training – tailored to their training needs
P7: yeah and I think definitely with annual reviews I think its always useful to have… that… you know… the expert knowledge on when we are trying to think of like… something we are really struggling with like targets… and setting targets and outcomes to make sure they are kind of like… smart… but also that we are putting the right strategies in place… because I think… we kind of have these ideas of what they…what they need to do… or the direction they need to go in… but its what do we provide and what support do we put in place to get them to that point… so for example like… with like communication… we obviously use [name – SALT] more to kind of… talk to her if there are any strategies and she has been trying to help us more with… like what to put in place… but when there are other barriers to learning in the classroom… like where are we getting that support from… we are just going on what we know as… you know… a provider of autistic education but also that individual… but it would be really good to have those expertise and hearing about other strategies.	Attend annual reviews – support decisions around next steps Advice on support and strategies for individual YP

Appendix O – Confirmation of Ethical Approval

↩ Reply all | ∨   🗑 Delete   ⊘ Junk   Block   ⋯

Ethical approval granted for 19166193 / CHARLOTTE BRENTON

Thu 01/04/2021 15:56

To: Brenton, Charlotte
Cc:

Dear Charlotte,

I am very pleased to inform you that your research project **'An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists'** for the year 2 research project on the Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology, has been given ethical approval. If you have any further queries in this regard, please contact your supervisor.
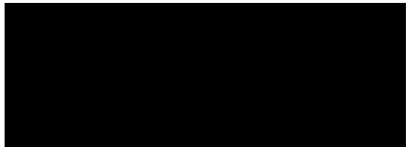
Please note that if your proposed study and methodology changes markedly from what you have outlined in your ethics review application, you may need to complete and submit a new or revised application. Should this possibility arise, please discuss with your supervisor in the first instance before you proceed with a new/revised application.

Your ethical approval form has been logged and will be uploaded to the UCL IOE database.

Very best of luck with your data collection!

Many thanks,

Will

Appendix P – Parent Information Sheet

Institute of Education

⋔UCL

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists

Parent Information Sheet

My name is Charlotte Brenton, and I am inviting your child to take in part in my research project. I am currently undertaking this research in partial fulfilment of the Professional Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

This project aims to explore the views and experiences of autistic young people (aged 18-25 years old) of their barriers to employment, the support they receive and find helpful from a Supported Employment Programme (SEP) and what additional support they feel is required. Although there seems to be a vast amount of evaluative research promoting SEPs as beneficial for this population, there are many gaps within this literature. Most strikingly, there is very little research that elicits the views and experiences from the young people themselves, resulting in their voices being underreported within the literature. The aim for this research is therefore to address this gap in the literature and provide insight into the lived experiences of these young people. Guided by the views and experiences expressed by these Young People (YP), this research will then also consider the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in supporting young people with autism within this setting, by exploring this collaboratively with the SEP staff. This aspect of the research aims to provide additional information to inform the researcher's considerations regarding the EPs role with post-16 young people and within post-16 settings; a new way of working for EPs and also an area within the research which is currently lacking.

This research will hopefully contribute to the development of the current methods in which young adults with autism are supported into employment, and provide guidance for EPs as to how they can support these young people within a SEP setting.

Who is carrying out the research?
Charlotte Brenton will be carrying out this research under the supervision of Dr Emily Midouhas (a Developmental Psychologist and Associate Professor at UCL Institute of Education) and Dr Chris Clarke (Educational Psychologist and Professional Tutor at UCL Institute of Education). This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

What will happen if my child chooses to take part?
This research study will consist of two phases. Your child is being invited to participate in **phase one**.

Phase one will involve one-to-one informal video (or telephone if the young people prefer) conversations between the researcher and the young person. A trusted adult

can accompany the young person if the young person wishes. The young person will be asked a few informal questions relating to their experiences of their barriers to employment, the support they have found useful during the SEP and what additional support they feel is required. All young people will be provided with a copy of these questions in advance, in an accessible format. These interviews will be video and/or voice recorded by the researcher. However, once these interviews have been transcribed, these transcriptions will be anonymised, and recordings will be deleted.

Phase two will consist of a focus group with SEP staff. Participants will be asked to complete a short activity prior to the focus group (reading a short amount of relevant information provided by the researcher). The researcher will provide anonymised feedback to the focus group regarding the key points shared by the young people during phase one. This information will provide the basis of discussions regarding the potential role of EP's within a SEP setting. This focus group will also be video and/or voice recorded by the researcher, with these recordings deleted once the focus group discussions have been transcribed and anonymised.

A summary of the research findings will be made available for all young people who participate, their parents and the employment programme staff following completion.

Does my child have to take part?
It is entirely up to your child whether or not they choose to take part. If they do choose to participate and later change their mind, they can withdraw at any point during the research, without giving reason, and their data will not be used.

Data Protection Privacy Notice
The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of 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. The Research Privacy Notice can be read by clicking here.

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 ▉▉▉
▉▉▉▉▉

If you have any further questions before you decide whether you are happy for your child to take part, you can contact the researcher via the contact details below.

If your child has expressed an interest in participating in this study, and you are also happy for them to do so, please let the researcher know via email, attaching the informed consent form to:

▉▉▉▉▉▉▉

By [DATE]

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

Charlotte Brenton - Researcher   Dr Emily Midouhas – Research Supervisor
▉▉▉▉▉   ▉▉▉▉▉

Appendix Q – Parent Informed Consent Form

Institute of Education

≜UCL

An Exploration of the Views and Experiences of Autistic Young People on a Supported Employment Programme and the Implications for Educational Psychologists

Parent Informed Consent Form

If you are happy for your child to take part, please complete this informed consent form and attach it in an email to Charlotte Brenton, at:

By [DATE]   Yes   No

1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet about the research.   ☐   ☐

2. I agree for my child to be video and/or voice recorded during the interview. ☐   ☐

3. I understand that if any of my child's words are used in reports or presentations   ☐   ☐
   they will be anonymised.

4. I understand that my child can withdraw from the study at any time, and that if my   ☐   ☐
   child does choose to do this, any data they have contributed will not be used.

5. I understand that I, or my child, can contact Charlotte Brenton or Dr Emily   ☐   ☐
   Midouhas at any time and request for my child's data to be removed from the
   project database.

6. I understand that the anonymised results may be shared in research publications   ☐   ☐
   and/or presentations.

7. I can contact UCL data protection (via email) if I have any concerns about how my   ☐   ☐
   child's personal information is used. I have read the data privacy information on the
   information sheet.

Name _____Signed _____Date _____

Charlotte Brenton - Researcher   Dr Emily Midouhas – Research Supervisor

Appendix R – Thematic Map of all Five Themes

Theme 1
Conceptualising Autism: The Combination and Interaction of Individual and Environmental Factors

Sensory Needs

Stereotyping and Discrimination

Difficulties Understanding, Communicating and Regulating Emotions

Others' Level of Autism Awareness and Understanding

Cognitive and Language Skill Difficulties

Positive and Unique Skills and Qualities

Social Awareness and Communication Difficulties

The Role of Appropriate and Relevant Support

Feeling Stigmatised and Rejected

Theme 2
Autism Identities: Juxtaposed Feelings

Feelings of Loneliness and Isolation

Low Confidence and Self-Esteem

Uncertainties Around Future

Ownership and Pride

Building Connections and Developing Relationships

SEP Community Acceptance and Understanding of Autism

Increasing Independence and Life Skills

Self-Advocacy Skills and Platforms

Further Social Skill Support

Theme 3
The Value of Practical Learning Alongside Understanding, Acceptance, Adjustments and Advocacy

Practical and Applied Learning Opportunities

Theme 4
Hopes for Increased Independence, Understanding Acceptance and Support

SEPs more Widely Available and Accessible

Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing Improvements

Supporting and Upskilling SEP Staff through Bespoke Training, Workshops and Supervision

Wider Autism Understanding and Acceptance

Building 'Employability' – Qualifications and Experience

Advocacy, Adjustments and Widening Autism Awareness

More Application of Person-Centred Approaches

Expanding Knowledge of Legal Rights and Available Support

Theme 5
Valuable Contributions from EPs/EPSs to Support SEP Students Learning, Wellbeing, Support and Outcomes

Building Positive Working Relationships with SEPs

Tailored Support for individual YP

Development of Models and Frameworks within SEP

Group Interventions & Support for YP, Parents and Placement Providers