

**The Role of Alternative Educational Provision for  
Young People Disaffected with Mainstream  
Education**

Magdalena Cajic-Seigneur

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## **Dedication**

To Max, a dedicated teacher, unerring friend, and loving husband and my sons  
Hadrian and Alexander who have been patient and encouraging;  
Your support has made this possible.  
To my parents who have taught me the importance of education.

## **Abstract**

Over the last thirty years there has been considerable debate on the organisation and structure of the 14-19 education system in England. Although the proposals for a unified system have dominated academic research, successive government policies have failed to fully integrate the 14-19 phase in education. Instead, academic and vocational education remain divided and the number of young people aged 16-19 in the NEET category unchanged.

This study of an alternative educational programme (AEP) for students who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) delves deeply into the problems that these young people are facing in an attempt to find solutions to motivate and engage them. This becomes particularly pressing in the wake of the raising of the participation age to 18 in 2015.

The study employs Bronfenbrenner's ecosystems theory which concentrates on the examination of the impact of different ecosystems on young people's development and progression in education. The case study incorporates a multi-method research strategy, which sought to gain the perspectives of different stakeholders on the effectiveness of the AEP and to examine its outcomes for students in terms of their academic, social and behavioural progress as well as their progression into the post-16 phase.

The findings indicate that this type of provision within an FE college provides positive outcomes for disengaged students but they also emphasise the importance that these young people place on the well recognised curriculum offered in mainstream schools.

The findings suggest that the English education system, which remains segregationist and divided, contributes to the widening of the socio-economic gap particularly in times of economic downturns and unstable employment opportunities.

The study recommends changes in different ecosystems, starting with 14-19 education which should offer a unified qualification structure that caters for all learners thus preventing these young people becoming NEET and socially excluded in their adulthood.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale for the study

This thesis is a critical evaluation of the New Horizons Programme (NHP), an alternative educational programme for Year 11 students, who have been excluded or were at risk of exclusion from local mainstream secondary schools due to their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), and sometimes learning difficulties.

When I started teaching on this programme, I was genuinely intrigued to find out what caused the disaffection of these young people with mainstream education. I noticed that the majority of students came from disadvantaged backgrounds. For my MSc Dissertation I undertook a study on this cohort, which examined the causes of disaffection. The findings indicated that these causes were complex and reached beyond the characteristics of individual learners and their immediate environment. This current study was designed to examine a range of wider factors that impact on the development of these young people in order to establish which ones have contributed to the young people's disenchantment with education.

The values that underpin this study stem from my strong belief in the need for an educational system that is founded on equality for all young people. Having been educated in another country in which the educational system was designed to offer equal opportunities for all, and having taught disaffected learners in England, I have developed an interest in curriculum design as an important tool in engaging young people with education. The English educational system divides young people into academic and vocational learners, which limits their chances for progression post-16, leaving them with narrow choices for the future. In this study, I set out to examine the main features of an educational programme for learners disengaged with mainstream education in order to assess its effectiveness in re-engaging these young people with education and facilitating their progression post-16.

The reasons for undertaking this evaluation study are four-fold. First as a teacher who was employed on the programme, I find it crucial to examine the NHP's effectiveness

in relation to students' attainment, retention and their progression and reintegration in further education, training or employment. Second, I was interested to find out how effective other alternative educational provisions (AEPs), which cater for similar cohorts, were and whether mainstream schools should do more to adopt their practices to include disengaged pupils and to prevent their disaffection and exclusion. Third, I was interested in exploring how the Key Stage 4 (KS4) Curriculum, that is the education of 14-16 year olds in their last two years of compulsory schooling, had historically developed in England and what part it played in learner exclusion patterns. Fourth, educational evaluation needs to adopt a comprehensive and systematic approach that will examine educational programmes in their natural settings with the aim of improving them by investigating their strengths and weaknesses, processes and outcomes through the involvement of their participants and other stakeholders with an interest in these programmes. To achieve this, I employed a research design that includes the examination of documentary evidence as a supplementary and contextual source of data. In this sense, this evaluation study will attempt to build on the existing educational evaluation framework.

With continuing problems of disengagement and disaffection with mainstream education among 14-16 year olds and the increasing proportion of young people in the age group 16-19 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), there is growing interest in how alternative curricula programmes in and out of school, can help in re-engaging such young people in order to enable them to progress into post-16 education, employment or training and prevent them from becoming NEET.

The question that arises is whether the current education system for 14-19 year olds meets the needs of these learners. The questions central to this study revolve around whether the NHP enhances learners' attainment and chances for successful transition to post-16 phase, what type of educational provision caters for these students' needs and whether the education system for 14-19 year olds should be divided or unified. To answer the first two questions, a systematic evaluation of the NHP was conducted. In addition to the evaluation of the NHP, a further examination of evaluation studies on selected other AEPs was undertaken in order to compare the findings from those studies with findings in this thesis so that conclusions could be drawn on what type of educational provision is the most suitable in re-engaging young people who are

disenchanted with the mainstream curriculum. To answer the third question, national KS4 curriculum reforms as well as the developments in 16-19 education policies in the last three decades or so were reviewed to identify the impact they might have had on the disaffection of these young learners.

Drawing on national curriculum changes, findings from evaluation studies on AEPs and findings from the evaluation of the NHP, this study will aim to contribute to the current debate on how government policy should organise the education for 14-19 year olds, including those young people who are disengaged from mainstream education and investigate whether the AEPs are suitable interventions which effectively address and respond to the needs of learners.

### School exclusions in England

The proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who were NEET has remained almost unchanged (at around 10 per cent  $\pm$  1 per cent) throughout the last decade (SFR 2014). Although research showed that a great majority of young people in this age group spent a short period of time being NEET as a part of transition from compulsory education through to post-16 education, training or employment, a significant minority of young people, around one in ten, failed to make a successful transition post-16 (SFR 2013) and remained NEET for longer periods, often due to their social, emotional or behavioural difficulties (SEBD), learning difficulties and often lack of support from their home. Copps and Keen (2009) claimed that the qualifications, the habits and experiences which young people gain and develop in the years that follow compulsory schooling, influenced their future earnings and employment, and their physical and mental health. This data and research findings show the importance of ensuring that the educational system offers a broad and engaging curriculum for 14-19 year olds that will cater for all learners regardless of their abilities and needs to enable them to make a successful progression following their compulsory years.

Those who are at most risk of becoming NEET are the young people who have been permanently excluded from mainstream secondary schools or who have repetitively received fixed-period exclusions. A fixed-period exclusion refers to a situation where

a pupil is excluded from a school but remains on the register of that school because they are expected to return when the exclusion period is completed. A permanent exclusion refers to a situation where a pupil is excluded and has their name removed from the school register. Following the permanent exclusion, these pupils would then be educated at another school or at an alternative educational provision, often a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), or a programme in college or further education. It is important to make a distinction between the two types of exclusion since the education and attainment results of those who are permanently excluded become the responsibility of the Local Authority (LA) whereas those who are excluded for fixed periods remain the responsibility of the headteacher in their school. In 2011/12, there were 304,370 fixed-term exclusions, which represented 9.41 per cent of school population, and 5,170 permanent exclusions, which was 0.07 per cent of school population (SFR, 2013). Although permanent exclusions were significantly lower than fixed term exclusions, research showed that fixed-term exclusions also had a negative impact on the education of these young people in terms of their engagement, behaviour, attendance and overall achievement (Sodha and Guglielmi, 2009). The annual statistics also showed that pupils with special educational needs (SEN), both with and without SEN statements, were over eight times more likely to be permanently excluded than those pupils with no SEN (SFR, 2013).

In January 2002, a new SEN Code of Practice replaced the five-stage model of the 1994 SEN Code and established that pupils with SEN can be placed on School Action, School Action Plus or a statement of SEN depending on the severity of their educational needs. The term Special Educational Needs covers a wide range of needs including literacy, numeracy and other learning and thinking (cognition) skills, behavioural, social and emotional skills, communication and interaction skills and physical/sensory skills including visual and hearing impairments. School Action is established when a child is identified as needing interventions that are additional to or different from those which are part of the school's usual differentiated curriculum and strategies. School Action Plus is established when the child's needs are such that the school needs to seek advice and support from external support services. A request for the statement of SEN may be made by school or parents, for pupils who have failed to make adequate progress through School Action Plus. However, the parents have to agree that SEN statement is made for their child.

In 2011/12, 24 in every 10,000 pupils with statements of SEN and 30 in every 10,000 pupils with SEN without statements were permanently excluded from schools compared with three in every 10,000 pupils with no SEN (SFR, 2013). This means that out of 100 exclusions, eight were pupils with SEN statements, 64 were pupils with SEN without statements but on School Action or School Action Plus, compared to 28 pupils with no SEN. Furthermore, the permanent exclusion rate for boys was approximately three times higher than that for girls, totalling 78 per cent of overall number of permanent exclusions. Statistics also showed that pupils who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) were around four times more likely to receive either a permanent or fixed period exclusion than pupils who were not eligible for FSM (SFR, 2013).

A total of 32.9 per cent of permanent exclusions and 24.1 per cent of fixed period exclusions were due to persistent disruptive behaviour (SFR, 2013). Although both permanent and fixed period exclusions have decreased compared to the previous year, the above figures indicated that these numbers were still high and that poor behaviour represents a problem in secondary schools. Research by Sodha and Guglielmi (2009) suggested that exclusion did not solve behavioural problems and was linked to very poor results in exams. Government figures confirmed the low achievement of excluded pupils with only 1 per cent of 15 year olds in PRUs who achieved five GCSEs at grades A\*-C or equivalent; 11.3 per cent who achieved five or more grades A\*-G and 82.1 per cent who achieved one or more qualifications. By comparison, 70 per cent of pupils achieved five A\*-C grades at GCSEs or equivalent in the general school population. Research also showed that there was a strong relationship between achievement at school and young people's chance of becoming NEET (Bynner and Parsons 2002). Longitudinal studies of young people in England showed that only 2 per cent of those who achieved five GCSEs at A\*- C were NEET in the following academic year, compared to 36 per cent of those who gained no qualifications at all; and 21 per cent of those excluded from school in years 10 or 11, the final two years of compulsory education, were NEET at the age of 16 (DCSF 2008; DCSF 2005). These studies showed that the exclusion from mainstream school had had a negative impact on these young people's achievement and progression post-16.

## The Scale of the Problem

Researchers have also identified that educational attainment and school quality are lower in disadvantaged areas. They suggested that school improvement in these areas required policies which were tailored to every individual area rather than application of generic measures (Lupton, 2004). Throughout the 2000s, the previous government placed strong emphases on area-based policies in order to improve educational experiences for all learners (e.g Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, Educational Development Plans). The former government's concerns about school exclusions, the National Curriculum and levels of disaffection of school age population was not surprising in light of the fact that the proportion of NEETs across the country in the first three months of 2009 increased from 13.6% to 15.6% (Lipsett, 2009).

The first large-scale study of NEETs, *The Cost of Exclusion*, estimated that young people who are NEET cost the UK economy £3.65 billion per year (Prince's Trust, 2009). Several strategies were initiated to combat the NEET problem, for example the September Guarantee guaranteed a suitable place in education or training for all 16-17 year olds; the creation of 35,000 additional apprenticeships and the investment of £650 million in financial support to 16-18 year olds.

In 2010, the new Coalition government agreed that an on-going investment in preventative and interventionist strategies was essential to reduce the number of permanently disengaged young people. They announced plans to introduce a National Citizen Service, which would provide all 16 year olds with an opportunity to develop skills and give them experience of the workplace and to allocate more money to the most deprived children and develop a fairer and more transparent funding system (White Paper, 2010).

In addition to these large-scale government initiatives, there have been many small-scale and localised projects taking place to address disaffection within schools and Local Authorities (LAs). Research findings on these out-of-school provisions suggested that alternative curriculum schemes could significantly change and improve disadvantaged pupils' attitudes towards learning and the way they perceive their school (Macnab, Visser and Daniels, 2008; McNeil and Smith, 2004; Stoney and



Steedman, 2004; Kendall et al, 2003; Vulliamy and Webb, 2003; Reid, 2002). However, a study undertaken by Ofsted (Office for standards in education) found that about a third of schools and almost half of local authorities were breaking the law by not providing suitable full-time education for excluded pupils (Ofsted, 2009).

As the number of exclusions remains problematic, there is a need for more research and evaluation of school and LAs' preventative measures to ensure the suitability and high quality of educational provision, whether in school or out-of-school in partnership with external providers, for those pupils who are at risk of being excluded. The present evaluation study will attempt to identify strengths and weaknesses of one of these alternative educational programmes taking into account its context, processes, inputs and outcomes, and the external and internal factors that influence the implementation of the programme, with the aim to improve the quality of the programme.

The Wolf Report (2011), commissioned by the Coalition government to review vocational education for 14-19 year olds, expressed concerns that between a quarter and a third of young people in the 16-19 group were either NEET or attending courses offering no progression to higher levels of education or employment. It called for central guidance on 16-19 vocational education to address the overall structure of students' programmes which would provide young people with better preparation for a constantly changing labour market and educational progress to life-long learning. It suggested that a more flexible, innovative, high quality and cost-effective system which is linked to local labour markets through more direct engagement of employers in delivery and quality assurance, would provide good vocational education and progression to further and higher education and rewarding employment for all young people. The Wolf review also suggested that those between the ages of 14-16 should be pursuing programmes of study comprising at least 80 per cent general education. It is, therefore, timely to review 14-16 curriculum changes in England. The emphasis in this study will be on the development of vocational education alongside general education, as well as the current structure of the 14-19 education system, in order to investigate their impact on the learners' participation and their progression post-16.

## Research Context

The New Horizons Programme (NHP) was located within a college of further education in the London Borough of East End<sup>1</sup>. At the time when I started this research, it was an established educational programme designed for KS4 students (then the two final years of compulsory education in England) aged 14-16, who have been excluded, were at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools or were unable to complete their final years of education within mainstream school for other reasons.

The case studies of individual students and their views on education experienced in school and college are presented and described in Chapter 7 of this thesis. The investigation into the background of the young people who attended the NHP revealed a number of reasons behind their disengagement with mainstream schooling. It indicated that the needs of these young people were not successfully addressed and that mainstream schools failed to break the barriers to learning they were facing. In order to illustrate the type of learners who are at the heart of my study, I provide here two short profiles of such individuals, one female and one male. Peter was a capable student who stated that his problems in school started when he returned to school following an injury he had sustained. He said that the teachers did not help him with his work which resulted in him falling behind with his GCSE coursework and consequently displaying disruptive behaviour in classes. He felt that he was not wanted in school and perceived college as a 'fresh start'. Stephanie was also referred to the NHP because of disruptive behaviour in school. She claimed that the teachers in her school failed to address bullying problems she was experiencing. She was not interested in the subjects she was doing at school because she could not see their relevance to what she wished to do in future nor were they helping her to acquire skills necessary to find a job that she wanted.

Thus, the NHP's focus was on the needs of students who find standard classroom structured learning difficult due to having SEN and to their life experiences and circumstances. This makes their social learning difficult and their transition to further education and lifelong learning often impossible without intervention. Therefore, they

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<sup>1</sup> This is a fictitious name for the Borough

require opportunities for learning and assessment which acknowledge and address their learning, emotional, social and behavioural needs. The aim of the NHP was to provide an alternative approach to teaching, mentoring and assisting students in preparation for their GCSE (General Certificate in Secondary Education) examinations and BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) assessments, and eventually to facilitate students' reintegration and progression into mainstream education, training or/and employment. In order to provide these opportunities, the student-teacher ratios were reduced; classes comprised 12-15 students and the teacher was supported in each lesson by a Learning Support Assistant (LSA). In addition to this, liaison with a multitude of external agencies, such as the local schools, the Tuition Centre (Pupil Referral Unit), the Reception and Reintegration Unit, the Local Authority, the Educational Psychology Service, the Youth Offending Team, Connexions and Social Services as well as working closely with parents or carers, was strongly encouraged.

In order to place this evaluation study into an historical and geographical/demographic context, it is important to outline the local context of the NHP. The London Borough of East End is one of the most deprived urban districts in the country. Its population is mainly white, despite the recent arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers. Seventeen of the borough's 20 wards have high levels of deprivation. Educational disadvantage is also high with the lowest proportion of adults with higher educational qualifications in the country. Many adults in the Borough have low skill levels and limited formal qualifications. There are 21.4 per cent of young learners in the borough with Special Educational Needs (Berzins et al, 2010). The 2011 Census indicated that in London Borough of East End 39.51 per cent of population aged 16-74 had no qualifications, compared to 23.73 per cent in London and 28.85 per cent in England; 34.44 per cent of population rented accommodation from Council, compared to 17.12 per cent in London and 13.21 per cent in England. The borough also has one of highest proportion of NEETs in England, one in four young people in the area are NEETs (Berzins et al, 2010). The local statistics derived from the 2011 census showed that the borough has the fifth largest proportion of residents in this category out of all local authorities in England and Wales, although other boroughs in East London have higher percentages. Residents have the lowest average level of income in London. Unemployment is above the national average. Approximately 1 in 10

households with dependent children have no adults in employment which is 50 per cent higher than London. An above-average number of children and young people suffer some financial disadvantage. The proportion of primary pupils eligible for free school meals (27 per cent) is above the national figure (20 per cent), as well as the secondary pupil figure (29 per cent, compared to 18 per cent). At the time of the last Ofsted inspection the borough was the eighteenth most deprived in the country; it is now the twenty-fourth, and the sixth most deprived in London. Although the Key Stage results are rising at all levels, they are still below London and national averages, in particular Key Stage 4 results for Maths and English GCSEs (DfE, 2009).

Young pupils who risk being excluded from school are given various kinds of support by the Early Intervention Service, which also works with school staff and parents. The Youth Support and Development Service cater for young people between the ages of 13 and 19.

### Purposes of the study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic evaluation of an alternative educational programme which will assess the effectiveness of the programme in meeting students' needs – their re-engagement in education, retention, academic achievement, reintegration and progression into further education, training and/or employment. It is hoped that the study will help to improve the NHP as well as guide future planning and implementation of alternative educational programmes (AEPs) but also support mainstream schools in adopting more inclusive and preventative practices for their most vulnerable pupils. This study is directly relevant to current debates on the structure of pre-19 vocational education and the concern about the number of young people who are NEET.

In order to conduct a systematic and comprehensive evaluation of educational programmes, which recognises and acknowledges the complexity and diversity of educational context, an appropriate evaluation approach needs to be adopted. This study adopts a case study approach and employs different research methods that examine the educational provision in its entirety.

Since the study involved the participation of various programme stakeholders in order to ensure its validity and reliability, the aim of evaluation in this study is to supply these individuals or groups who are interested in or affected by the programme (these include students and their parents, programme staff and management, external agencies involved in the programme), with valid and relevant information drawing on the strengths and weaknesses of the NHP; the external and internal factors which influence the NHP's implementation; and to identify areas for programme improvement and further development.

### Research Questions

In order to achieve the above outlined purposes, the following research questions were set during the planning stage of the evaluation:

1. What are the views of students and staff on the effectiveness of the NHP?
2. What are the implications of this study for the current debate on the 14-19 curriculum?
3. How can Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory guide an examination of an Alternative Educational Programme?

In order to explore and answer this initial set of questions, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was used. Each of these methods is explained in more detail in the methodology section.

### Ethical issues and the researcher's role

As an insider researcher, a teacher who was employed on the NHP at the time when this research was undertaken, I had an obvious stake in the NHP. Consequently, this raised a range of issues in relation to the reliability and validity of the study. It is important to recognise here that it is difficult to achieve total objectivity since my beliefs and values influenced my methodological approach and interpretations.

Nevertheless, the researcher should ensure that biases for or against the programme are minimised. In this study, this was attempted by involving various stakeholders during the different stages of evaluation, data analysis and interpretation. In addition investigator triangulation, methodological and data sources triangulation were also employed (Denzin, 1989). This was achieved through the investigation of documentary evidence and staff and students' views on different aspects of the programme.

The adoption of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (BEST) as my framework for data collection and analysis was influenced by my views on disaffection and the complex factors that cause it. These views led to the examination of the different 'systems' that surround young people.

Different ethical issues of confidentiality, voluntary participation and the avoidance of personal risks needed to be addressed when investigation into individual students' case studies was conducted. This method of inquiry could have encountered more sensitive and personal circumstances so parental and student consent needed to be gained.

As with all qualitative research unforeseen ethical implications may arise, thus it was essential that I was aware of a need to constantly review those and decide how to address them when they occurred, throughout the evaluation process.

The planning stage of research involved group discussions with the NHP staff in regards to the data sources and collection. I defined the aims and objectives of the study and the research questions that the study was proposing to answer. These were then discussed with the programme staff to identify any further themes relevant to this study. I explained to the NHP staff and management that in order to ensure credibility and validity of the findings and avoid any conflict of interests or power relationship, it was necessary to adopt an open communication amongst all the stakeholders.

It was also necessary to be aware of my relationship with students as their teacher. At the beginning of each interview, I explained to each interviewee my role as a teacher researcher and the reasons for undertaking the study. I asked them to read and sign the consent form if they were willing to take part in this research. I stressed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point

if they wished to do so. I explained that their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the programme were intended to be used to improve the programme and would in no way affect my opinion of them or their studies.

Throughout the evaluation process, all the evaluation materials were available to the stakeholders for examination. This allowed me to ensure that correct and relevant information was presented. It is also hoped that this strategy ensured the avoidance of evaluation biases that could potentially be associated with my role on the NHP.

### Organisation of the thesis

This introduction is followed by a review of literature, which is the focus of Chapter 1 and 2. Chapter 1 reviews KS4 Curriculum reforms and the development of 14-19 education system in England in the past few decades and discusses their impact on the disaffection of young people in these age groups. The purpose of this examination was to put these educational reforms in an historical perspective and to highlight their successes and failures.

Chapter 2 attempts to define the key terms related to SEBD and SEN, presents the main risk factors for disengagement, describes the consequences of disengagement and exclusion from mainstream school and focuses on reviewing literature on the evaluation studies of alternative educational provisions and findings in these studies. It draws on commonalities and differences in findings in these studies which were used in later chapters to compare to findings from my study in order to assess what type of provision has positive outcomes for the most vulnerable young people who experience SEBD and who are, as such, at most risk of becoming NEET for longer periods of time and socially excluded.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the research framework and the methodology of the study. It discusses how this framework was developed and how the research questions and sub questions were generated, drawing on KS4 curriculum reforms and evaluation studies on alternative educational provision. It also explains the different methods incorporated into the research design.

The findings from research methods described in Chapter 3 were analysed and presented in Chapters 4 to 8 to provide the bases for answering the first research question. Chapter 4 discusses findings from documentary evidence that was developed and used on the NHP. Chapter 5 outlines the findings from group discussions with the NHP's staff on their perspectives on the NHP's effectiveness. In Chapter 6 students' views on various aspects of the NHP and college are explored through responses to students' questionnaires. Chapter 7 examines students' background, their educational experiences and causes of disaffection with education. It explores further the themes that emerged in other data findings through an in-depth account given in their interviews. In chapter 8 the views of the NHP's heads are discussed based on the interviews conducted with them.

Chapter 9 brings together all research findings and provides a discussion on the implications of the findings in this evaluative study for the current debate on 14-19 curriculum as well as KS4 reforms.

Chapter 10 outlines the limitations of the study, offers recommendations and conclusions.

## Summary

This introduction outlines my intentions for undertaking the present study and the rationale behind it. From a historical perspective, there has been little research evidence of a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of full-time alternative educational programmes for Year 11 excluded students, which investigated the long-term impact of these programmes on 16-18 NEET figures.

Given the current debate on 14-19 curriculum reform, this makes alternative programme evaluation an essential endeavour so that feedback on the outcomes and the implementation processes can be reported to the programme managers and other stakeholders who may have an interest in the programme, with the aim of improving it. Starting from the premise and recognition that not all learners have the same abilities, aspirations and support from their immediate environments, and if the aim of



the education system is to raise all children's aspirations regardless of their background, then that educational system must ensure that educational provision is suitable for all types of learners. This means allowing the use of different teaching strategies, learning experiences and an effective assessment system which suit particular types of learners the best.

The introduction of the English Baccalaureate performance measure with its aim of increasing the number of learners taking five specific GCSEs (English, Mathematics, Science, Geography/History and a Language other than English) to age 16, regardless of whether students continue on vocational or academic routes, will undoubtedly have an impact on the type of learners who are the subject of this study. This research casts some light on this change in national policy.

## CHAPTER 1

### 14-19 EDUCATION IN ENGLAND - RECENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

#### 1. Introduction

The ultimate aim of this study was to illuminate current approaches to the education of disaffected KS4 students, those students who are at most risk of becoming NEET post-16, in relation to what are taken to be an historically significant set of values about what is worthwhile in human life and consequently what are the proper aims of education. Although the focus of this study, in the main, is on the education and curriculum offered to 14-16 year olds, the study also touches on the education of 16-19 year olds since the personal position taken by the author supports the view that the 14-19 educational phase needs to be unified rather than divided. This position is influenced by the government intentions for raising the participation age (RPA) to 18 in the near future. Second, by the fact that for many learners decisions at 14 are determined by what the schools they attend have on offer and that the qualifications and grades which they acquire at 16 largely influence their progression post-16. Third, by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which emphasises the importance of this age in the development of young people. Finally, by my personal experiences as a teacher engaged in teaching the 14-19 cohort of disaffected students.

In order to place this study within an historical perspective, the focus in this chapter is on the main reviews of the 14-16 curriculum and reforms which have taken place in the last three decades or so since the introduction of TVEI which heralded the importance of the 14-19 education phase (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). This period also saw major changes in 14-16 as well as 16-19 education through the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 and its subsequent changes in the 2000s, the rise in school exclusions at KS4 in the 1990s due to students' disaffection and disengagement, the implementation of an array of vocational programmes since the 1990s and the concerns over the post-16s' participation in education and training due to the number of young people who are NEET which has remained constant over the last decade.

In relation to the structure of the 14-19 education system in England, according to Hodgson and Spours (2008), there is a general consensus amongst policy-makers, education practitioners and researchers, about the need for a coherent 14-19 phase. However, their views on how 14-19 education and training should be organised are very different. Successive governments have supported the view that a 14-19 phase is about the development of vocational education separate from academic education. Those in the education profession, policy and research, advocate an alternative view of 14-19 education and training development which will transform learning for all young people. Thus, there is no agreement as to whether the 14-19 phase should maintain an academic/vocational divide or whether a more unified curriculum and qualifications approach should be adopted (Hodgson and Spours, 2008: 19).

In addition to this dissent over the structure of secondary and upper secondary education, the organisation of the secondary school system has remained based on selective rather than comprehensive principles which has led to the polarisation of the education system and the division of learners into academic and non-academic (Ofsted, 2004).

Despite calls for an inclusive 14-19 curriculum which could ensure smoother progression for all young people to the 16-19 phase (e.g. Working Group on 14-19 Reform 2004), the Wolf Report (2011) recommended yet another overhaul of the 14-16 education system in which an emphasis was placed on academic subjects and delaying specialisation until the post-16 phase, and for a clear distinction to be made between the 14-16 and 16-19 education phases.

The impact of Wolf's recommendations, the number of NEETs and the implications of RPA make an examination of 14-19 education system in England timely. This literature review attempts to investigate what impact the development of the 14-19 education system might have had on disaffection and disengagement of these young people and their inability to make a successful transition to post-16 education and training. It briefly reviews the main government policies relating to secondary education since the 1980s, KS4 curriculum changes and the structure of 14-19 education system. It examines the recommendations of a number of recent reviews of the 14-19 phase, their implementation and the current approach to 14-19 education.

## 1.1 Secondary/general education in England since the 1970s

Historically, the English education system has been selective, dividing young people into those who can pursue an academic, technical or vocational programme and those who leave compulsory education without any qualifications and end up in the NEET group. In order to achieve a more inclusive system and enhance economic prosperity, successive governments have attempted to encourage wider participation through the introduction of a broader curriculum, ‘applied’ and ‘vocational’ routes, reformed qualifications, promotion of ‘personalised’ learning, encouragement of collaboration between educational institutions and independent providers, and advocating integration of local social, health and educational services. Despite these changes in the system of education and training, low achievement in vocational education still persists, and the level of skills and knowledge, particularly basic literacy and numeracy skills, of those leaving education is considered unsatisfactory by employers (Wolf, 2011; CBI, 2010).

## 1.2 The aims of education

The Fisher Act of 1918 and the Butler Act of 1944 both suggested that all young people up to the age of 18 would benefit from being engaged in education and training indicating that every learner in every area needed to have an equal opportunity to participate in education to enable them to have fulfilling careers and to contribute positively to their communities. Admittedly, not all learners have the same abilities, career aspirations and more importantly opportunities for learning. Moreover, many of those learners come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It is important, therefore, to reiterate here that the main aim of education should be to offer the same opportunity to all learners, regardless of their social environment and the stimulation which they receive from it, in order to introduce them to future adult life in which they would feel economically independent, satisfied in their jobs and which would allow them to make a positive contribution to wider society.

However, the Norwood Report (1943) declared that the population can be divided into ‘three types of mind – academic, applied scientific and those who understood concrete things rather than ideas’. Following the recommendations of the Norwood Report

(1943), schools were divided into grammar schools for the more academic pupils, technical schools for specialist practical education and secondary modern schools for a more practical, non-academic style of education. Pupils were allocated to a particular type of school by taking an examination at the age of 11, which was also introduced under the 1944 Act. Similarly, the Crowther Report (1959) proposed a new 'technical system' alongside the traditional academic programmes. This was followed by the Newsom Report (1963) which addressed the appropriate provision for the 'non-academic stream'.

In *Circular 10/65 - The organisation of secondary education* (DES, 1965), the Labour government requested local education authorities to submit plans for reorganising their schools on comprehensive lines. It stated that 'It is the Government's declared objective to end selection at eleven plus and to eliminate separatism in secondary education (DES, 1965: 1). However, Chitty (1989: 38) wrote 'Circular 10/65 had no statutory power'. The Labour government at the time failed to establish a fully comprehensive system and selection in secondary education survived.

### 1.2.1 Selective versus comprehensive education in the 1980s

An attempt was made to change this division between academic and non-academic in 1972 when the school-leaving age was raised to 16 and the majority of secondary schools were to become comprehensive, recognising that all young people should be given an opportunity to participate in general education up to this age. Unfortunately, the 1979 Education Act repealed these plans for comprehensivisation of secondary schools. In the years to come, the 11-plus selection for grammar schools and division between academic and non-academic was to be maintained. The schools were to be transformed into an education market place with an 'effective and independent inspectorate', a government-defined 'minimum curriculum' and specified 'minimum standards'. Government policy initiatives were aimed at establishing a wider variety of secondary schools and providing greater parental choice (DES, 1980).

Furthermore, the government approach to the school curriculum and education began to be centralised (for example *LEA Arrangements for the School Curriculum 1979*, *The School Curriculum 1981*). The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) set out the

National Curriculum with its ‘attainment targets’ – the knowledge, skills and understanding which children would be expected to have by the end of each key stage (pupils were divided into Key Stages, depending on their age, Key Stage 1 for pupils aged 5-7, Key Stage 2 for pupils aged 7-11, Key Stage 3 for pupils aged 11-14 and Key Stage 4 for pupils aged 14-16); the ‘programmes of study’ to be taught at each key stage; and the arrangements for assessing pupils at the end of each key stage (DES, 1988). The school results were to be published in league tables which led to comparisons between schools and parents were given free choice as to where to send their children.

Jones claimed that ‘the ERA system fostered the creation of local hierarchies of schools, linked to social class differences between their populations’ (Jones, 2003: 134). Similarly, Benn and Chitty suggested that ‘by 1994 policy was fuelling polarisation rather than resolving it; funding arrangements ensured that extra resources went to schools that were already doing well in terms of intake and achievement while in other schools there developed a pile-up of social and educational problems’ (1996: 226).

Gillard (2011) wrote that as a result of the 1988 Act schools became unwilling to take on pupils with learning difficulties since they tended to depress overall test results. This encouraged teachers to practise for the tests and to concentrate on children who were on the borderline between one level and the higher rather than on those who were underachieving and needed attention most.

### 1.2.2. From selection to specialisation in the 1990s

In the 1990s the government introduced specialist schools claiming that ‘children excel at different things...and some schools may wish specifically to cater for these differences’ (Patten 1992:20-21, quoted in Chitty and Dunford 1999:27).

Following the introduction of new specialist schools in the early 1990s, the independent National Commission on Education expressed concerns in its final report *Learning to succeed: a radical look at education today and a strategy for the future*,

condemning government's obsession with creating 'a greater variety of secondary schools' and warned that 'as we see it, there is a serious danger of a hierarchy of good, adequate and "sink" schools emerging within the maintained system' (NCE 1993:180). It stressed that the main aim of education should be to give all children, particularly those in the middle and lower bands of attainment, access to 'high-quality' schooling. It concluded that creating greater choice and diversity could lead to selection and social segregation. Nevertheless, the Conservative government of the time continued to pursue the diversity agenda with its 1992 White Paper *Choice and Diversity: A New Framework for Schools* by criticising the comprehensive system for 'presupposing that children are all basically the same and that all local communities have essentially the same educational needs. ... the provision of education should be geared more to local circumstances and individual needs: hence a commitment to diversity in education' (DfE 1992: 3-4).

Accordingly, in 1994 the government announced the setting up of new grammar schools and allowed schools to select more of their pupils. These decisions were contradictory to the research which revealed that Scotland, which adopted comprehensive education, achieved significantly better academic results than England. The proportion of pupils achieving the equivalent of five GCSE A-C passes in Scotland was 52 per cent whereas in England it was only 38.4 per cent (Benn and Chitty, 1996).

### 1.2.3. Continuing with selection through specialisation from 1997-2004

Despite the promises by the Labour Party politicians in opposition to abolish selection by examination or interview, the change in government would see little change in education policies compared to those of the Conservatives. In their 1995 document *Diversity and excellence: a new partnership for schools*, although expressing their opposition to academic selection at 11 and exclusion of children by examination, the Labour government stated that 'a change in the character of a school could only follow a clear demonstration of support from the parents affected by such decisions' (Labour Party, 1995).

The new Labour government's education policies were published in the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997b). Its main proposals of interest for this study

were plans for secondary schools to become 'specialist schools' allowing them thus to select a small proportion of their pupils on the basis of 'perceived aptitudes'; setting targets for raising standards in attainment; and the setting up of Education Action Zones to provide support for under-performing schools in areas of disadvantage. The government's aim was to have 500 specialist schools open by September 2000 and 650 a year later. In relation to grammar schools, the White Paper proposed that selection would remain in those areas which practised it unless parents voted against it locally. They tried to justify this orientation towards specialisation by stating that 'the idea that all children had the same rights to develop their abilities led too easily to the doctrine that all had the same ability' (DfEE, 1997b: 11).

It was clear that the anomalies and inequities inherited from the Conservatives were to be accentuated rather than inhibited through the policy of 'selection by specialisation'. It thus became evident that the New Labour government was continuing to base its education policy on the principles of competition, choice and diversity, the market-orientated education policies which had been introduced by the Conservative governments. In pursuing its policies on 'selection by specialisation', the government announced in 2000 that hundreds of comprehensive schools would be turned into 'specialist colleges' over the following three years (Labour Party, 2000).

Many educationalists criticised this decision to allow selection by aptitude. Chitty (2004:69) argued that 'in a class-divided and highly competitive society ... specialisms could never be equal: they would rapidly become ranked in a hierarchy of status'. Similarly, Jones pointed out that that the type of school attended - grammar, secondary modern, comprehensive - had a significant impact on pupils' achievement (Jones, 2003).

Gillard (2011) criticised government policies on selection which he claimed caused poorer schools, in less affluent areas, to become even worse. As a result, these schools found it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain good staff. Therefore, the government policies exacerbated the problem and widened the divide between successful and unsuccessful schools.

In the other countries in the UK, however, the position was different. Similar to Scotland which adopted the comprehensive principle as mentioned in previous



section, in 2001 the Welsh Assembly's statement on education, *The Learning Country*, also envisaged 'a fully comprehensive system of learning' (NAW 2001:8) so that 'inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups, and individuals' could be 'narrowed in the interests of all' (NAW 2001:10).

Jesson compared the results of two local education authorities with similar profiles, one with a comprehensive system and one with a selective system. His research showed that in the comprehensive authority 52 per cent of pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs. In the authority with grammar schools the figure was 48 per cent (Jesson, 2001 cited in Chitty and Benn, 2004).

Nevertheless, rather than supporting the comprehensive ideal, in its 2001 White Paper *Schools achieving success*, the government proposed the creation of greater diversity in secondary education through the introduction of more specialist schools and city academies which they argued would ensure equal educational opportunity for all, improve achievement in under-achieving schools and narrow the gap between social classes (DfES, 2001).

Following a report by Ofsted and the Audit Commission *School place planning: The influence of school place planning on school standards and social inclusion* (Ofsted, 2006) which warned the government that its policy of allowing parents to choose their child's school was polarising the education system and trapping poor children in the worst schools, the government requested that local authorities 'take a fresh look at the evidence that selective schools 'inhibited' educational opportunities for a wide range of young people' (*The Guardian* 12 December 2002 cited in Gillard, 2011).

#### 1.2.4. The end of the comprehensive principle from 2004

The government's *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* which was published in July 2004, proposed that all schools become specialist schools; new 'independent specialist' schools could be set up and the academy programme be expanded (DfES, 2004d).

In November 2004 *The Children Act* established a Children's Commissioner to champion the views and interests of children and young people, and required local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation between agencies and other appropriate bodies (such as voluntary and community organisations) in order to improve children's well-being.

To go with the Act, the government published *Every Child Matters: change for children* which commenced the radical changes across the whole system of children's services, including schools. It stressed the need for multi-agency partnerships to work together to ensure the 'well-being' of all young people. Its main aims were for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they needed to: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being (DfES, 2004c).

In response to the problems of under-performing schools and under-achieving pupils in disadvantaged areas, in 2005 the government published its White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*. It proposed that secondary schools became independent state schools ('trust schools') sponsored by private businesses, charities, faith groups, universities or parent and community organisations. It gave schools rights to determine their own curriculum and ethos, form parents' councils which would make decisions on the day-to-day running of the school and on issues such as school meals, uniform and discipline and 'take note of' guidelines on admissions and there would be a pupil banding scheme to ensure a mix of abilities. Local education authorities would lose most of their powers and would become 'parents' champions' rather than education providers; schools would be encouraged to tailor lessons to individual pupils and there would be more support for struggling pupils (DfES, 2005b).

There were concerns that the White Paper's proposal to give schools rights to decide their own curriculum and greater autonomy in determining their selection procedures would make the situation worse in disadvantaged areas. Jesson showed that children who did not pass the eleven plus in a selective area were condemned to lower standards of education than if they went to a comprehensive school in a non-selective area (The Observer 19 February 2006).

The last document important to this study that the previous New Labour government published was its *Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*. This plan involved consultation with children, young people, parents, teachers and policy makers, and was designed with the intention to guide all future government policy relating to children, their families and schools. It aimed to eliminate child poverty and reduce illiteracy and antisocial behaviour by 2020 (DCSF, 2007b) through putting emphasis on personalised learning and emotional and social well-being of all young people and recognising and respecting the learner's voice (Pring et al, 2009).

In an attempt to modernise comprehensive schools, the New Labour Government opted to continue the Conservatives' policies on selection through specialisation, parental choice and performance tables, turning schools into a market place and thus abolishing the great idea of comprehensivisation. The main aim of education became the improvement of performance according to standards which are set by central government. However, it could be argued that to create equal opportunities for all learners, the aims of education should encompass a wider set of outcomes including the understanding of personal and social development of young people rather than imply those covered in the targets, performance indicators and assessments which currently 'drive' education policy and practice (Sodha and Margo, 2010; Pring et al, 2009). This was attempted to be remedied in New Labour's initiatives such as *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) and *Children's Plan* (DfES, 2007) which adopted a more holistic, personalised approach to support every child up to the age of 19; Education Action Zones aimed at reducing under-achievement in the areas of economical and social deprivation and the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) to encourage those over 16 young people from poor backgrounds to continue their education and training.

Based on evidence presented in previous sections, it could be argued that this selective system of secondary education has contributed to low social mobility, poor literacy and numeracy, under-performance and under-achievement in schools in disadvantaged areas, disengagement with education and higher levels of NEET in disadvantaged areas (Pring et al, 2009; Chitty and Benn, 2004; Chitty, 2002).

The introduction of ‘personalisation’ by the New Labour government, however, could be seen to be promoting the ideas of those who supported the ‘comprehensivisation’ of secondary education which were in quest for equality of opportunities for learners of all abilities and from different backgrounds.

The proponents of a unified 14-19 system argued similarly for the creation of a more cohesive education system through introduction of an overarching certificate which caters for all learners (Hodgson and Spours, 2008).

In the next section, I turn to reviewing the organisation of 14-19 education in terms of qualifications, structure and curriculum framework which were introduced to tackle the problems outlined above.

## 2. The development of curriculum, qualifications and structure of 14-19 education system in England

Only 40 years ago, 80 per cent of young people left school at the age of 15 without achieving any qualifications. Some of them continued further training in the form of apprenticeships which included a day of study at a technical college but the great majority of young people who did not achieve any qualifications were considered not to be able to benefit from further general education.

The General Certificate of Education (GCE) at Ordinary Level and Advanced Level were introduced, mainly to grammar schools, in 1951, and replaced the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate. Following the recommendations of the Beloe Report (1960), the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) was introduced alongside the O- Level examination for those learners who were deemed non-academic.

However, in 1986 CSEs and O-Levels were integrated in the new General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) which, although intended as a qualification for the whole cohort, included less practical and relevant learning than the CSE. In the 1990s,

the major school performance indicator became the number of learners achieving five GCSEs at A\*-C grades which was perceived as the 'pass mark' (Pring et al., 2009).

Those who do well at school and achieve a minimum of five GCSEs at grades A\*-C or equivalent are most likely to remain in full-time education either in a school sixth form, further education college or sixth form college and to take A Levels post-16. Those learners who fail to obtain this GCSE threshold are likely to pursue vocational qualifications below advanced level, at Entry or Level 1, in different institutions usually in colleges of further education or different training programmes offered by independent learning providers (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). It is these learners that are the focus of this study and require the most attention since they are at most risk of becoming NEET in the longer term.

### 2.1. Vocational education in the 1980s and 1990s-integration of theoretical and practical learning

Since the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s there have been a number of government schemes in the area of vocational education for young people including those who were not in full-time education, apprenticeship or employment, such as the Unified Vocational Preparation (UVP), the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). The Further Education Unit's (FEU, 1979) A Basis for Choice (ABC) and Vocational Preparation, established the principles of a pre-vocational education which was aimed at developing general understanding based on occupational interests, providing young learners with key skills, guiding them in choosing a desired career path and advising them on the further training which they need to pursue their chosen career. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) was introduced which attempted to integrate theoretical and practical learning, academic and vocational studies, in a general education for all. It was designed to equip young learners with skills and knowledge necessary for further study and employment but it also promoted recording of achievement, careers education and guidance, work experience and core skills. TVEI thus focused on curriculum development rather than qualification reform (Hodgson and Spours 2008). In 1987, it was extended to all 14-18-year-olds, thus advocating the concept of progression between 14-16 and 16-19 education for these learners.

However, TVEI faded away with the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 which made all education the same for state-funded schools, in order to ensure that all pupils had access to a basic level of education.

## 2.2 Vocational education 1991-2000-division between academic and vocational education

The White Paper, *Education and Training for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1991) introduced a divided national qualification framework based on three tracks with distinctive curricula and assessment. It comprised A Levels as an academic track, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) as a broad vocational track and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) as a work-based track (Hodgson and Spours 1997).

In addition to this, the government appointed a review into the national curriculum in 1993. The Dearing Report *The National Curriculum and Its Assessment* argued that the curriculum had become unmanageable and impossible to implement; it criticised the time spent on paperwork and testing which, it claimed, was damaging good teaching and learning. Recommendations were made that the content of the curriculum be reduced; less time be spent on assessment, with around a fifth of teaching time for use at the discretion of schools. At Key Stage 4 schools had greater discretion, with some subjects to become optional; and some curriculum choice to be introduced at Key Stage 3 (Dearing, 1993). The government accepted these recommendations and spent £744m amending the national curriculum.

In 1996 Sir Ron Dearing was commissioned by the government to review Qualifications for 16-19-year-olds. His report (Dearing 1996) recommended changes to vocational qualifications which were ‘justified on the grounds that the academic/vocational divide was inhibiting learner progress, that there were high levels of non-completion, that problems of basic literacy and numeracy existed for all but the highest achievers and that the qualifications system was complex and lacked clarity’ (Hodgson and Spours, 2003: 17). It suggested a more coherent national framework of qualifications through the introduction of overarching certification at different levels including a new Entry Level but which would retain the three distinct tracks introduced in the 1991 White Paper.

At the same time, the New Labour party in opposition published its document *Aiming Higher* which proposed the development of a unified and modular 14-19 curriculum and qualifications framework (Labour Party, 1996 cited in Hodgson and Spours, 2003). However, the consultation document they published while still in power, *Qualifying for Success* (DfEE, 1997) did not reflect these proposals.

### 2.3 The move to a greater focus on vocational education for 14-19 year olds in the 2000s

During the 2000s, the government put more emphasis on the recognition and development of the 14-19 phase of education and training. This was confirmed in The Government's White Paper *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES, 2001a) and the Green Paper *14-19 Education: Extending opportunities, raising standards* (DfES, 2002). The Green Paper acknowledged that a major challenge teachers, schools and government were facing was disengagement from learning. The main consequences of this disengagement were that students were leaving school without GCSEs, half of all students gaining fewer than five A\*-C grades GCSEs, there were low progression rates to further education post 16 in comparison with many other developed countries and early drop-out at 17+ (DfES, 2002). The government thus announced that it intends to relax the National Curriculum for certain sections of the 14 to 19 years school age population to enable less able, disadvantaged and disaffected pupils to be allowed to spend more time on alternative and vocational curriculum initiatives. The Green Paper, *14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*, promoted vocational learning at Key Stage 4, in the last two years of compulsory education and also allowed disapplication from some subjects at KS4 (DfES, 2002). The emphasis was on motivating young people and enabling them to progress to further work-based learning in post-compulsory education. In accordance with this, the government encouraged schools to offer a wider range of alternative qualifications alongside traditional GCSEs, such as GCSEs in vocational subjects. These qualifications allowed students to study on either academic or applied tracks and new GCSEs in vocational subjects aimed to enhance the vocational and work-related opportunities for young people in Key Stage 4. The government-sponsored Increased Flexibility

Programme (DfES, 2003b) provided resources for schools to develop these alternative qualifications and emphasised the importance of collaboration between providers in a local area to offer off-site 'alternative' provision for one or two days per week (Golden et al, 2005). The introduction of new 'vocational' qualifications at Key Stage 4 since 2002, increased participation in full-time education and training post-16 rather than increased the numbers in work-based learning (Hayward et al, 2006 cited in Hodgson and Spours, 2008).

Subsequent to the Green Paper, the government published *14-19 Excellence and Opportunity 2003* which set up Tomlinson's Working Group (DfES, 2003c) to examine assessment, coherent learner programmes and a unified qualifications framework (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). The Tomlinson Report, published in 2004, recommended a unified system of qualifications with an entitlement to a broader education for all. It proposed a new diploma system that would gradually replace all existing qualifications for 14-19-year-olds from Entry to Advanced level. It suggested that young people would take fewer written examinations than in the current system, and assessment by their teachers, lecturers and trainers would be given more importance (Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004). However, in the White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* (DfES, 2005b) these recommendations for a unified multi-level diploma system, were rejected by the New Labour government. They proposed instead the new vocational 14-19 Diplomas which would be developed alongside traditional GCSEs and A Levels. The White Paper also identified the need for motivating curricula for those 14- to 16-year-olds disengaged with the programmes offered in mainstream schools.

At the same time, a comprehensive and independent review was commissioned by the Nuffield Foundation. The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training in England and Wales aimed to review the whole of 14-19 education and examine: educational aims; quality of learning; appropriateness of assessment; qualifications framework; progression into higher education; further training and employment; institutional provision; and government control and responsibility (Pring et al., 2009). It suggested the creation of a new settlement in which vocational learning and the work-based route played a larger and more high-status role within a more unified and coherent 14-19 system. The Review argued for a more devolved system of education



and training, based on a new balance between national, regional and local levels of governance. This would emphasise partnerships between education and training providers and other stakeholders in the system. It proposed that state control over education and training needed to be reduced and that central government should be more responsive to the needs of local communities, educational professionals, parents, learners and employers. It stressed the importance of the teacher as a creator of the curriculum, which had been undermined by governments' centralised approach, the prescription of curriculum in which teachers were not involved and an emphasis on external assessment.

From 2004-2010, there was a statutory entitlement to work-related learning (WRL) for all learners in Key Stage 4 (DfES, 2003b). The National Curriculum changes were also aimed at motivating and engaging pupils and helping them to achieve, tailoring assessment to teaching and learning, providing more opportunities for focused support and challenge, providing the flexibility for schools to personalise learning and ability to design a curriculum that reflects and meets the needs of their learners and allowing for a smooth progression from primary, through secondary and post compulsory education (QCA, 2007).

The new 14-19 Diplomas which were introduced from 2008 aimed at providing a mix of general and applied learning in 'real world environments' to prepare young learners for life and work (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). They included three components, two mandatory and one optional: Principal Learning which is sector related is aimed to 'develop knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to a broad economic sector, using realistic contexts and leading edge sector relevant materials'; Generic Learning entailed common skills essential to successful learning and future employment, personal learning and thinking skills, a project, work experience and the functional skills in English, Mathematics and ICT; and Additional/Specialist Learning consisted of optional units and qualifications which would allow learners to choose their programme of study according to their interests and career aspirations and it offered further specialisation in the chosen area (DCSF, 2008b).

Since the Diplomas were confined to Levels 1-3, the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) was designed to 'establish an inclusive curriculum offer at Entry Level and Level 1

for learners from age 14 upwards' (QCA/LSC 2005, quoted in Hodgson and Spours 2008). FLT included skills for life and work, vocational subject-based learning, and personal and social development. The design of both the Diplomas and FL, was the same for 14-16-year-olds and 16-19-year-olds which meant that it extended over the whole of the 14-19 phase, recognising this phase as a single phase of education. This was intended to enhance transition and progression for those learners who still experience discontinuity at the age of 16 and to improve their participation post-16.

However, all of these developments in vocational learning, including the Diplomas and FL, represented alternatives to general education and the academic route rather than providing the basis for the development of the 14-19 system as a more coherent phase. In this sense these initiatives maintained a divided approach to qualifications reform. Hodgson and Spours also questioned 'whether these new programmes in KS4 have broadened educational experience for all learners in this age group, although an evaluation undertaken for QCA claims that, as a result of the work-related entitlement from 2004, there has been 'an increase in the provision that schools make for all their students' (QCA, 2007 cited in Hodgson and Spours, 2008).

#### 2.4 Retreat of vocational education in KS4 in the 2010s-The Wolf Report

The Wolf Report (2011) criticised this increase in the volume and nature of 'vocational' education at KS4 and estimated that around 20 per cent of the cohort gained qualifications at too low a level to start Level 2 courses at the end of KS4. The Report argued that this had an implication for post-16 vocational education since many vocational programmes below Level 3 did not provide for clear progression to either education or employment. It was concerned that employers recognised qualifications that were stable and familiar or 'real' work experience and that they might be reluctant to accept a new award such as Foundation Learning. It further argued for quite general vocational programmes for all 14-19 year olds which would help young people develop core/general skills, particularly in English and Mathematics, needed in different sectors and occupations as well as in specific jobs rather than highly specific, vocational qualifications. In the Report, Professor Wolf claimed that English and Mathematics GCSE at grades A\*-C are fundamental to

young people's employment and education prospects, recognising that less than 50 per cent of students have both at the end of KS4 and that at the age of 18 the figure is still below 50 per cent, with only four per cent of the cohort achieving these qualifications during their 16-18 education. It, therefore, recommended that all young people should continue to study for English and Maths qualifications at GCSE level until the age of 19 if they had not achieved them earlier. In addition to these core skills, the Review revealed that employers value work experiences in a proper, paid job, so young people needed more opportunities to obtain genuine workplace experience and employment-based skills. The Report made strong recommendations for broadening apprenticeships and criticised the fact that in 2009 only six per cent of employers recruited any 16 year olds and only 11 per cent recruited any 17 or 18 year olds.

In relation to vocational education for 14-16 year olds, the Review found that there was an overwhelming consensus among its respondents that all young people in KS4 should have access to 'vocational' or 'practical' courses which should offer options, emphasising the value of practical skills alongside the academic curriculum in KS4, but that there should be no substantial degree of specialisation before the end of KS4. More specifically, it recommended that young people should not spend more than 20 per cent of their timetable on vocational learning. This led to a much greater emphasis on 'academic' courses for young people in schools and further education. These recommendations in the Wolf Report may be having a significant impact on the young people in Year 11 who are the subject of this study since they have been disaffected with and disengaged from academic programmes offered in mainstream schools and referred to an alternative educational programme within a college of further education to allow them to study more practical courses. Instead of pursuing the integration of academic and vocational education, which was advocated by those who supported a comprehensive secondary system, successive governments have opted to keep them separate and develop vocational learning as an alternative to academic programmes. The Coalition government introduced the new performance measures, the English Baccalaureate, which requires the achievement of five GCSE A\*- C grades in academic subjects leaving vocational subjects to 'suffer inferior fate' once again.

## 2.5 The quality of vocational education

Research has shown that there are several problems associated with vocational programmes in England. First, in compulsory education, vocational learning is still seen as an alternative programme for a minority of 14-16 learners who are less able, disaffected and disengaged (Haines, 2006). This is confirmed by Ofsted which stated that ‘in some schools the target group for the new courses is mainly low attaining pupils’ (Ofsted, 2004: 3). This has inevitably attached a negative image to vocational education which is associated with underachievers who are unable to succeed within general education and as a way of tackling learners’ disaffection from general education.

Second, Fuller and Unwin (Fuller and Unwin, 2007 cited in Hodgson and Spours, 2008) wrote that employers played only a secondary role in the initial education of young people in that the employers’ involvement in training was voluntary and it varied across different sectors depending on company size and its historical involvement. This has led to government initiatives which encouraged the involvement of FE colleges and independent training providers to supplement for a real work-based context. Although colleges have more facilities and specialist staff than schools and have sought to improve their capacity in this respect through the Centres of Vocational Excellence initiative, this cannot substitute for the workplace with its real life demands and possibilities (Hodgson and Spours, 2008).

Third, the Adult Learning Inspectorate claimed (ALI, 2006 cited in Hodgson and Spours, 2008) that this lack of a genuine work-based context in which vocational learning takes place did not develop the skills and knowledge required by the qualifications, which has led to the further problem of quality in vocational and work-based learning. This has been reflected in inspection reports on work-based learning, with lower completion rates in vocational courses and in apprenticeships than in general education (Hayward et al. 2005 cited in Hodgson and Spours, 2008). Poor completion rates in vocational qualifications and apprenticeships and their non-recognition by employers, when compared with academic qualifications, have resulted in the low status of these qualifications in the eyes of learners themselves and their parents, who are the main stakeholders (Hodgson and Spours, 2008).

In 2008, the Government proposed to improve apprenticeships through defining the meaning of apprenticeship more clearly, increasing quality and specifying employers' involvement (DIUS/DCSF, 2008b). The main aim behind these proposals was to increase the number of young people who choose to pursue this route. It was planned that in the next decade, one in five of all young people would enter an apprenticeship. The Wolf Report (2011) also put great emphasis on the development of high quality apprenticeships and need for 'real' work experience for young people. It requested more direct engagement of employers in delivery and quality assurance. The Richard Review of Apprenticeships was published in November 2012. It proposed how apprenticeships in England can meet the needs of the changing economy. Its recommendations included redefining of apprenticeships, focusing on the outcome of an apprenticeship and using recognised industry standards which would form the basis of every apprenticeship. It required that all apprentices reach a good level in English and maths in order to successfully complete their apprenticeship. Following the Review, the Coalition Government responded to the consultation in the Implementation Plan which set out policy, process and timescales for reforming apprenticeships in England.

## 2.6 The Future of the 14-19 education – a divided or unified approach

Learning its lessons from history, how then can the English education system ensure that it caters for all young learners irrespective of their backgrounds, abilities or stimulations they receive from their immediate environments, and prevent them from becoming a NEET?

Many have argued that the current system which divides young people into academic and vocational learners deepened social inequalities and contributed to social segregation (Chitty and Benn, 2004; Jones, 2003; Chitty, 2002).

The White Paper *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES, 2001a) proposed a creation of 'a more coherent 14-19 phase of education, including improved vocational education and greater flexibility after 14'. The main reviews on 14-19 education also supported these views and recommended a coherent 14-19 system. However, these

recommendations for a unified multi-level diploma system were rejected by successive governments.

Hodgson and Spours (2008: 54) proposed ‘a more open and inclusive approach to general education which will offer all 14-19-year-olds different types of general education, including practical, applied, experiential and community-based learning which will be motivational and which they can pursue beyond the age of 16’.

At present, too many young people leave education and training as soon as they complete compulsory education or in the first and second years of post-compulsory education (Hodgson and Spours 2008). Ofsted (2008: 14) said that ‘although 14-19 is treated as a single phase in education and training ... in practice, for many young people, and particularly those on vocational programmes, there is still a discontinuity at age 16’.

An approach which supports the 14-19 phase as a single phase in education and training is based on a recognition that this is an important phase in young people’s lives which encompasses a number of changes including making choices about courses and subjects they wish to study for their GCSEs or vocational qualifications, work-related learning which will prepare them for employment; future career they would like to pursue; transition they face at 16 in terms of educational provisions; as well as the development of their own identity, a transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.

However, it is likely that the 14-19 phase will be forgotten again for a while since the Wolf Report has taken the stance that there is a clear distinction between the 14-16 and 16-19 phases and has proposed the design of distinctive courses for each phase. The Report did express concerns about those young people who leave KS4 education with few or no qualifications of value. It stated that ‘there is almost bound to be a sizeable number of young people who are not able to engage with a regular post-16 programme...’ due to their learning difficulties, disrupted educational experiences and lives. It recommended that for these young people, the priorities are the improvement of the core academic skills of English and maths and workplace experience.

Following the recommendations in the Wolf Report, Michael Gove announced that the great majority of GCSE-equivalent vocational qualifications be stripped from school league tables. The Coalition government believes that the solution is in making GCSEs and A Levels more rigorous rather than providing the young people with skills and a broad knowledge which encompass academic, vocational and work-related learning. It remains to be seen thus, what impact this will have on engagement, achievement and further progression for the type of learners who are the subject of this study.

### 3. Tackling the NEET group

The latest Government's statistics showed that 82.8 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds in England were participating in recognised education or training (full-time education 67.2 per cent, work-based learning 5.6 per cent, employer funded training 3 per cent and other education and training 5.8 per cent). The remaining 16.2 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds were not participating in recognised education or training (of those 7.4 per cent were in jobs without training and 9.6 per cent were not in education, employment or training) (SFR, 2013). In the current economic climate, there is pressure on the government to consider the impact of the deepening recession on participation in education and training by 16 and 17 year olds and high unemployment rates for young people in this age group with 36.6 per cent of economically active 16-17 year olds who have left school and were unable to find a job (McGuinness, 2014).

Participation in recognised education and training amongst 16 to 18 year olds in England is currently not fully compulsory and the previous government introduced a range of policies to increase participation on this basis. In relation to qualifications and curriculum, these included the development of four distinct pathways: GCSEs and A Levels; Diplomas; Apprenticeships and the Foundation Learning Tier (now known as Foundation Learning). In addition to this, a range of education and training options were introduced to increase participation for young people who are in employment but not in education or training and those not in education, training or employment (NEETs) through Activity Agreements, the Accrediting Employer Training pilots and Learning Agreements. Reducing the number of NEETs was a key aim of the

government. In response to these concerns, the Labour government committed to making participation in education and training by 16 and 17 year olds in England compulsory. The 2008 Education and Skills Act announced the RPA to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015. The new Coalition government's Education Bill supports this intention, although there is no requirement to enforce these changes on young people, parents and employers. The possible impact of RPA on academic achievement, patterns of participation, access to vocational education and training, student attendance and behaviour, and alternative educational provision needs to be considered. Spielhofer et al (2007) suggested that the young people who were most likely to be affected by this policy were those who would otherwise have been NEET due to their poor academic achievement and often disengagement with mainstream schooling. In their more recent study of RPA which examined the opinions of young people who were NEET, Spielhofer et al. (2009) found that almost half of the young people who were interviewed thought that it would require schools and colleges to offer young people disaffected by school a second chance. The young people thought that it would encourage education and training providers to develop courses suitable to all young people's needs, levels of learning and preferred learning style offering non-classroom based provision and more practical learning. This would require designing and providing a range of post-14 and post-16 pathways including work-based learning and high-quality alternative provision to engage all young people, and evaluating the effectiveness of delivery and collaboration amongst all education and training providers in local areas.

The Labour government 16-18 NEET agenda comprised the following key themes: early identification of those young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET; personalised advice, guidance and support to allow young people to choose and access the most suitable provision and to address their barriers to learning; a flexible mix of learning provision in both pre- and post-16 programmes to meet the needs of every young person in every area, and a stress on rights and responsibilities of young people themselves to re-engage in education or training (Bysshe et al., 2008). The Coalition Government's policies agree that those young people who underachieve are more likely to become NEET. In their document *Building Engagement, Building Futures* (DBIS, 2011), they identified that in order to improve the engagement of these young people with education, intervention during early and



teenage years is needed as well as providing apprenticeships, coherent vocational education within 16-19 provision, financial support and introducing the 'youth contract' (DfE, 2011).

However, I would argue that to effectively target these groups and understand their barriers to participation, it is necessary to examine common causes of disengagement and disaffection in a local area that could give an early indication of a young person at risk of becoming NEET. The literature review of the characteristics and aspirations of young people who are NEET, revealed a number of factors related to education and learning as well as a range of personal issues which had an impact on young people becoming NEET (Spielhofer et al, 2009). Through an evaluation of the New Horizons Programme, an alternative educational programme for disaffected Year 11 students, and its impact on reducing the number of NEETs, in later chapters this study will also examine the characteristics and background of the young people who are at risk of becoming NEET in one of the most deprived London boroughs, in an attempt to make a contribution to the development and evaluation of local education authority policy and provision for this group of young people. Employing Bronfenbrenner's 'ecological systems theory' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it will describe the importance of different systems within which an individual interacts (family circumstances, school experience-curriculum, local community context, youth labour market) and their relationships. Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological systems theory to explain how everything in a child and the child's environment affects how a child grows and develops. He named different levels of the environment that influence children's development, including the microsystem, the meso-system, the exo-system, and the macro-system. The microsystem is the small, immediate environment the child lives in. Children's microsystems include any immediate relationships or organizations they interact with, such as their immediate family or caregivers and their school. Bronfenbrenner's next level, the meso-system, describes how the different parts of a child's microsystem work together for the well-being of the child. The exo-system defines the larger social system in which although the child is not directly involved, its structures impact the child's development by interacting with some structures in her microsystem. Finally, the macro-system outlines the economy, youth labour market, society and culture in which young people are raised since these have an effect on their further progression and development post-16.

Having a clear understanding of what the factors within the system are, how they interrelate and how they affect young people, can aid teachers and educational policy makers to tailor their curriculum, teaching and assessment approach for this group of young people.

In this chapter, I examined the structure, curriculum and qualifications of 14-19 educational system in England, as an important 'structure' within the ecological system which has an effect on a young person's development and thus successful transition to adulthood. It is important to explain here that school and the NHP, as an alternative education provider, are seen as the structure of the 'micro-system' in which relationships can have impact in two directions (bi-directional influences) among teachers, parents and students, which Bronfenbrenner called the 'meso-system'. The educational system, on the other hand, is seen as the structure of the 'macro-system' since it is designed by policy makers and cannot be influenced by parents and students, it is external to them although its structures (for example the education system, school curriculum, education policies etc.) impact on the young people's development through interacting with some structures in their micro-system (for example the type of school which they attend, support for their SEN, disciplinary policy etc.).

In the next chapter, the emphasis is on the description of findings from other alternative educational provisions as important micro-systems, and their impact on young people's development. The meanings and definitions attached to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) were also examined in order to identify and explain how the working definition of the term emerged and why such definition was adopted in this study.

## CHAPTER 2 – EDUCATIONAL DISENGAGEMENT AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

“As educators we are usually unable to affect the social or family circumstances in which learners are living and growing; but we could do more to offer a curriculum which permits young people to make choices, to build self-confidence, and to see the connections between learning and a better life” (NIACE, 1999: 1).

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 examined the 14-19 education system in England. The concerns were expressed about the number of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the possible effect of the RPA and Wolf report on these young people in terms of curriculum offered to young people both in Key Stage 4 and 16-19 phases. It is argued here that the current educational system for 14-19 year olds, which is based on a division of academic and vocational pathways placing its emphasis on academic subjects, does not effectively engage these young people and that the unified approach to education of 14-19 year olds would allow smoother progression post-16 which would enable all young people to remain in education and training. This study employs Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994) ecological systems theory to explore and explain different eco-systems and the causes of disaffection and disengagement. The investigation of curriculum development in the previous chapter represented the examination of a macro-system as an overarching educational system that influences how local micro-, meso- and exo-systems are implemented. The research on alternative educational provisions (AEPs) outlined below, and the evaluation of the NHP in later chapters in this thesis examined micro-, meso- and exo-systems that operated on these programmes. These studies indicated that a number of factors, related to personal issues, other than factors related to education and learning, impact on the young people’s disenchantment with education. It revealed that alternative curriculum, intensive pastoral care, small class sizes and inter-agency support were effective strategies which developed and built young people’s confidence and personal, social and functional skills necessary for successful

progression post-16. It is also argued here that the application of the ecological systems theory within the educational system would give a helpful insight to policy makers into different systems that influence the development of young people and that might have an impact on their disengagement and disaffection with education. The understanding of different factors that operate in the lives of young people, could also enable the policy makers to make appropriate changes in their policies to tackle those factors which cause disengagement, thus achieving the main aim of education which is to cater for all regardless of their social class, individual circumstances and special educational needs and minimising the number of young people who do not participate in education, training and employment (NEET).

This chapter examines studies on a range of alternative educational provision for disaffected students which are similar to the provision in this study in terms of its participants, their educational background and often socio-economic background. Section 1 outlines the problem of exclusion from school and government initiatives to tackle disaffection with education. Section 2 attempts to define the terms used to describe these young people. The consequences of and risk factors for educational disengagement are addressed in section 3. In section 4, research findings on alternative educational provisions are examined to assess the overall effectiveness of these initiatives in re-engaging young people in education and training.

## 2.1 EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOLS

In response to rising numbers of school exclusions in the 1990s, the government introduced both legislation and numerous policies to tackle this issue. The Educational Act 1993 introduced Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) to deal with excluded pupils and reviewed the conditions for initiating school exclusions. The Act stressed that head teachers should only resolve to use exclusions (particularly permanent exclusions) as a sanction as their last option and after they had exhausted alternative approaches, for example identifying and addressing a pupil's special educational needs. Government Circular 8/94 and 9/94 (DfE, 1994; DfE, 1994a) addressed disaffection within mainstream education and emphasised the importance of alternative provision and a focus on personal and social education and emotional

development to lessen disaffection and disruption. However, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) expressed its worries about perceived low standards in off-site special units, PRUs (Ofsted, 1995), and the quality of many specialist schools for pupils experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD schools) (Ofsted, 1997). The Green Paper 'Excellence for all Children' (DfEE, 1997c) called for the greater inclusion of all children in mainstream schools and effective behaviour policies in schools and local education authorities (LEAs). In the same year, the Education Act was produced, with the aim of enabling schools to deal more effectively with discipline and behaviour problems (DfEE, 1997d). In addition to this, the Programme of Action was published for special educational needs, which recognised the need for alternative provision for a small minority of pupils, particularly those experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) (DfEE, 1998). It recommended that 'a range of appropriate provision, including effective PRUs and high quality special schools... and imaginative approaches to the curriculum, particularly in years 10 and 11, which involved further education colleges and voluntary bodies' (para. 25). These alternative approaches could encourage and motivate disaffected young people and help them to understand the relevance of school to future work and learning. In 1998, Circular 1/98 (DfEE, 1998a) was published on implementing *Behaviour support plans* asking LEAs to implement strategies to co-ordinate planning and provision for children presenting behaviour difficulties.

Research evidence also suggested that changing curriculum content and the method of delivering it, could be used as a means of reducing exclusions (OFSTED, 1996; Daniels et al., 1998). This has been reflected in later government policy on reforming and disapplication of the Key Stage 4 (KS4) curriculum (then the last two years of compulsory education). Following DfES initiatives to implement social inclusion practices by providing for a relaxation of National Curriculum requirements at KS4 (DfES, 2003b), schools have been able to tailor the curriculum for KS4 pupils in order to reduce exclusion risks and meet individual needs. The evaluation of work-related learning schemes showed a positive impact of these initiatives on re-engaging young people (Kinder et al. 2000; DfES, 2001). The analysis of student achievement on the NHP in Chapter 4 in this study also indicated that alternative curriculum design has had a positive impact on student engagement.

### 2.1.1 Exclusion and SEN

Much research has recognised that difficult behaviour which leads to exclusions may relate to unrecognised or poorly addressed special educational needs (Hayden and Dunne, 2001; Berridge et al., 2001). Pupils identified as having SEN did worse at every key stage level, for example just one in five pupils with statements achieved expected levels in English and maths at Key Stage 2 compared to 92.9 per cent of other children in English and 89.5% for maths. This gap deepens as pupils grow older and only 1 in 20 pupils with statements achieved the expected level at GCSE (5 A\*-C GCSE grades including English and maths) Sodha and Guglielmi (2009). For pupils identified as having SEN who are also eligible for Free School Meals (FSM is a commonly used indicator of deprivation), the figures are even lower: just over one in ten reached expected level of attainment in English at KS2 (years 5 and 6 in primary school). Pupils identified as having SEN are more likely to have unauthorised absences from school and more likely to be persistent absentees: 10.1 per cent of pupils with School Action Plus and 9.4 per cent of those with statements, compared to 2.4 per cent of pupils without SEN. Rates of fixed-term exclusions are higher by 1.8 per cent for pupils without SEN, 5.7 per cent for those with School Action, 12.1 per cent for those with School Action Plus and 8.8 per cent with statements (DCSF, *Children with Special Educational Needs 2009: An analysis*). These pupils are also more likely to be permanently excluded: less than 0.05 per cent of pupils without SEN are permanently excluded, compared to 0.2 per cent with School Action, 0.85 per cent of pupils with School Action Plus, and 0.35 per cent of pupils with statements. Seventy per cent of permanent exclusions included pupils identified as having SEN (Audit Commission, 2009). It is evident that a punitive approach is often being used to deal with these forms of SEN rather than specialist provision.

In this study, the student profile indicated that in any given year approximately 83 per cent of the cohort on the NHP were identified as having SEN (mainly due to Social, Emotional and/or Behavioural Difficulties) and had been referred to the NHP due to either exclusion or being 'at risk' of exclusion from mainstream education. In the same borough, there was a dramatic increase in the number of secondary school pupils with SEN, from 15 per cent in 2005 to 30 per cent in 2010 (DfE, 2010). It is clear that the

education system is failing pupils identified as having SEN despite the fact that the previous government was committed to offering provision for SEN pupils that included child-centred and joined-up services, much better outcomes, a highly trained workforce, and better measurement of success (DCSF, 2003).

## 2.2 The role of further education

The Dearing Review of 16-19 Qualifications (DfEE, 1996) stated that some young people could benefit from a more mature environment. The Working Group on 14-19 Reform, chaired by Sir Mike Tomlinson (2004), also noted the benefits for young people from the more mature, adult environment within further education. The involvement of further education colleges has been recognised as a key policy for re-engaging disaffected young people in the education system (Lovey, Docking and Evans, 1993; DfEE, 1997a; Bromfield, 1999). Ofsted (1999) also identified a need for a range of appropriate provisions outside traditional mainstream schools, including PRUs, special schools and further education links as a means of attracting these young people to education and training.

In January 2003, the previous Government published its vision for reforming the way in which the education system catered for young people aged 14-19. They committed themselves to raising the participation and achievement levels of young people. Particular efforts were being focussed on bringing back to learning those individuals not participating or at risk of dropping out by involving further education colleges.

The potential of the further education sector to raise participation in education is likely to become even more important when participation in education and training becomes compulsory for 17 and 18 year-olds in 2015. The Wolf Review (2011) stressed the role of FE colleges in catering for 14-16 year olds.

## 2.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS

There are several concepts which require definition at this point, before the investigation of an appropriate alternative educational provision for disaffected young

people at risk of becoming a NEET. The following terms need to be defined - disengaged, disaffected and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and there needs to be an explanation of how these terms are used in this study.

Writing about the use of different labels to describe groups of people who are 'either impeded in gaining access to, or are unable to maintain themselves within, mainstream education and training' (Education and Employment Committee, 1998 cited by Hodgson in Hayton, 1999: 11), Hodgson (in Hayton, 1999) described 'disaffected' as '...the individual who does not support societal norms and is thus seen as potentially deviant, or, at the least, has negative feelings about social institutions (including the education and training system)...' (pg.12).

She further noted the use of the term 'disaffection' by the authors in an IPPR report, *Wasted Youth: Raising achievement and tackling social exclusion* (Pearce and Hillman, 1998) as an umbrella term to cover 'young people in compulsory education, whether they are non-attenders and disenchanted pupils or those exhibiting behavioural difficulties or anti-social behaviour'. She asserted that when used as an umbrella term, the concept of disaffection became complicated because 'it confuses the attitude of individuals with what society (or the state) is doing to the individual' (Hodgson in Hayton, 1999: 12).

Haughey (2009) quoted researchers (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007; Gillman et al., 2000; Maras, 1996) who had proposed that "labelling of children and young people who face difficulty in the context of school is unhelpful and that individuals should not be viewed as 'disaffected' but as having become involved in a process of disaffection which causes difficulty in school" (Bennet, 2005; Rees and Bailey, 2003; Fan and Chan, 1999; Cameron, 1998; Solity, 1996).

The adoption of such working definitions of disaffection or disaffected, where an individual who experiences difficulties in school is described as being involved in a process of disaffection rather than being disaffected, suggests that these difficulties are not inherent in these young people but are the product of more complex factors. These factors are derived from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), which is explained in more detail in the theoretical framework section in Chapter 3 in this thesis.



However, if these difficulties or needs are not detected in time or dealt with in an effective way, then this process of disaffection can worsen and lead to disengagement.

Although the term ‘educational disengagement’ is not clearly or easily defined, it can be described as ‘switching off or disconnecting from learning’ (adopted from Sodha and Guglielmi, 2009) and it is expressed through educational underachievement, attitudes towards education, persistent truancy, bad behaviour and exclusion (pg 28-30).

There is often a distinct overlap between educational disaffection and educational disengagement, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD<sup>2</sup>) as well as between their causes and symptom (see Figure 2.1). So for example, disaffection and disengagement could be both a cause and a symptom of SEBD.

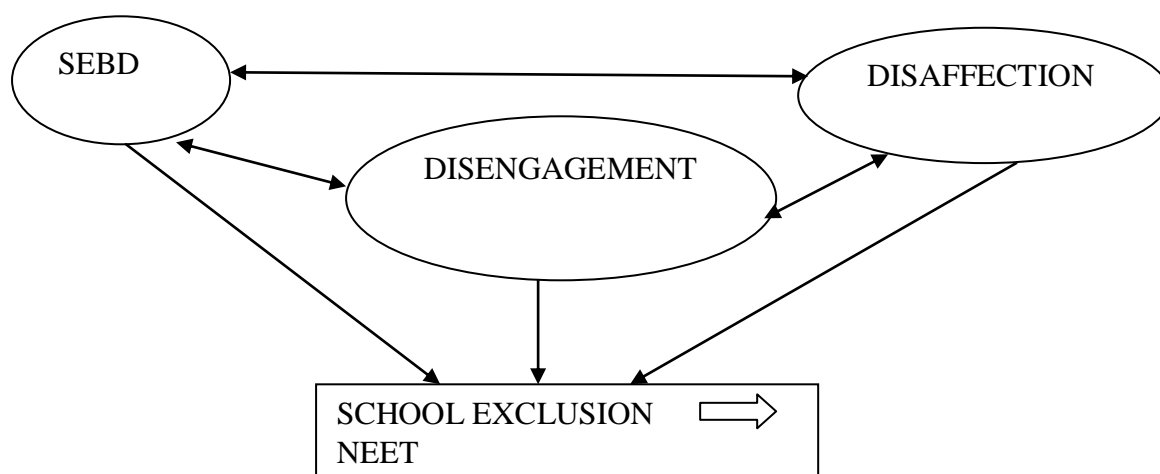


Figure 2.1 – The relationship between disaffection, disengagement and SEBD

Many researchers pointed to the ambiguity of the term SEBD (Visser et al, 2003; Cooper, 1996; Cole, Visser and Upton, 1998) mainly due to the fact that the definitions are often broad, context-specific and therefore open to many interpretations. O’Brien (in Lewis and Norwich, 2005: 167) confirmed the difficulty in defining the term by saying that ‘EBD and SEBD can be conceptualized as

<sup>2</sup> The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) replaced the previous category ‘EBD’ with ‘SEBD’

constructs that are culturally defined and redefined by understandings that are shared or contested by different groups in different locations and contexts'. Circular 9/94 (DfE, 1994a: 7) provided the following definition: 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties range from social mal adaptation to abnormal emotional stresses. They are persistent (if not necessarily permanent) and constitute learning difficulties.' The Department for Education's definition implied a bio-psycho-social and eco-systemic nature of EBD (Cooper, 1996; Cooper, Smith and Upton, 1991). It said that 'Children with EBD are on a continuum. Their problems are clearer and greater than sporadic naughtiness or moodiness and yet not so great as to be classed as mental illness.' (DfE, 1994a: 4). The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (DfE, 1994b) described pupils who experience EBD as having learning difficulties and stated that 'Emotional and behavioural difficulties may result, for example, from abuse or neglect; physical or mental illness; sensory or physical impairment; or psychological trauma. In some cases, emotional and behavioural difficulties may arise from or be exacerbated by circumstances within the school environment.' (DFE, 1994b: 64). The Department for Education and Employment offered further guidance for statutory assessment of EBD: 'Evidence of significant emotional or behavioural difficulties, as indicated by clear recorded examples of withdrawn or disruptive behaviour; a marked and persistent inability to concentrate; signs that the child experiences considerable frustration or distress in relation to their learning difficulties; difficulties in establishing and maintaining balanced relationships with their fellow pupils or with adults; and any other evidence of a significant delay in the development of life and social skills.' (DfEE, 2001: 83). Both of the UK government's definitions outlined above, reiterated this vagueness and fragility of the term since they use words such as 'mal-adaption, abnormal'. It is clear in both definitions that 'difficulties' need to be persistent and that they amount to a 'learning difficulty'. However, the second definition requires the evidence in the form of recorded examples of 'withdrawn or disruptive behaviour' etc., giving more detail and insight for practitioners to make the decision whether the child is experiencing SEBD. This certainly makes it easier for teachers to raise concerns about an individual child.

Labelling young people can potentially have a detrimental effect on their future development since it impacts on their self-esteem. Therefore, the terms 'disaffected', 'disengaged', 'experiencing SEBD' need to be used in a way that does not imply

‘within-child deficit labelling’ (O’Brien, 2005: 166). Hence, in this study, these young people are identified as ‘young people who experience SEBD’. This term also recognises that SEBD is socially constructed and could be linked to a particular activity and/or environment.

It is of a paramount importance for the practitioners in this area to understand that unless there is an underlying (neurological) medical problem or an extreme case of neglect of a young person, these young people should be treated as any other adolescent not as deviant individuals who need to be removed from the school roll because they interrupt their peers learning. Teachers should certainly avoid using medical or even criminal descriptors such as disturbed, troubled, maladjusted since this will only reiterate and strengthen the negative image these young people have and carry about themselves.

We can conclude from the above discussion on the use of terms SEBD/disaffected and the definitions used by practitioners, that in the majority of cases an appropriate early intervention, might have prevented these individuals from becoming disengaged. In the case of ‘restorative’ measures, it is important to understand the underlying causes of problem behaviour so that effective alternatives to exclusion can be put in place in mainstream schools and, for the small proportion of those who are excluded, high quality educational provision outside of school offered.

## 2.4 THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISENGAGEMENT AND EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL

The main consequence of disengagement from education is that young people become NEET.

The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) showed the link between young people’s attitude towards their education and becoming NEET. Those young people with more positive attitudes were less likely to be NEET at age 17 (Chowdry et al, 2009). Children who do poorly at school are more likely to be NEET with over a quarter of those who gain no GCSEs becoming NEET (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Only one in ten of those who are below expected levels of attainment at

the age of ten go on to get five A\*-C grades in GCSEs (DCSF, 2008b). Those excluded from school end up with a range of negative outcomes including a much higher chance of being NEET at age 16 to 18. In LSYPE, even being suspended from school between the ages of 14 and 16 was associated with achieving lower GCSE grades at age 16 (Chowdry et al, 2009).

The Office of National Statistics (2006) revealed that twenty-five per cent of 19-year-olds still fail to achieve a basic level of qualification, and up to 10 per cent have no qualifications at all; twenty-two per cent of pupils (150,000) aged 16 obtained no GCSEs above a grade D; ten per cent of pupils (75,000) aged 16 obtained fewer than five GCSEs; and three per cent of pupils (25,000) aged 16 got no GCSEs at all.

Parsons (1999: 64) argued that ‘disaffection, truancy, disruption and exclusion are disproportionately found in disadvantaged groups’.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families’ Children’s Plan (DCSF, 2007) was intended to close the gap in educational achievement for disadvantaged children. Bradbrook et al (2008: 15) defined disadvantage as ‘any life circumstance which negatively affects life quality and life chances. Disadvantageous factors include deprived neighbourhoods, low income and poor health’.

Education is particularly important because educational achievement is associated with virtually every standard measure of socio-economic success. The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (DfES, 2006) conducted a seven-year research programme which found that, as well as influencing the obvious outcomes (for example, qualifications and career), learning can positively affect health and well-being, attitudes and behaviour.

Disputing the pessimistic views that schools cannot compensate for society (Plowden Report, 1967), researchers reported the differing effects schools serving similar catchment areas had on their pupils (Mortimore et al., 1988; Rutter et al., 1979). Research evidence showed that school quality is poorer in disadvantaged areas (Lupton, 2004). Young people from the poorest fifth of families are less likely to go to a school in England with an outstanding Ofsted report (16 per cent compared to 27

per cent from the richest fifth of families) (Ofsted, 2007). Sodha and Margo (2010) reported that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are out-performed by their peers at every stage of the educational system and this gap widens as children grow older. They are less likely to say they are happy at school (84 per cent compared to 89 per cent from the richest fifth) and are less likely to say it is valuable (80 per cent compared to 89 per cent). The probability of being NEET in England is over seven times greater for children from the poorest fifth of households (DCSF, 2009). In 1997 Ofsted noted that state schools with large numbers of children from poor homes were by far the worst performers at GCSE.

## 2.5 Risk factors for disengagement

An investigation into educational disengagement requires consideration of the complex multitude of factors that underpins it. Sodha and Guglielmi (2009) identified the following factors for disengagement in Table 2.2.

Child-level risk factors	Environmental-level risk factors	Structural factors
Low levels of core academic skills — communication and language, literacy, numeracy	Parenting and family factors	Experiences of disadvantage
Low levels of social, emotional and behavioural competences	School-level factors	
Low aspirations	Community factors	
Poor emotional and mental wellbeing	Peer group factors	
Special educational needs		
Neuro-development disorders (e.g. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; ADHD)		

Table 2.2 – Risk factors for disengagement (*Source:* Sodha and Guglielmi, 2009)

Similarly, Bynner (2000) called these ‘Childhood risk factors’ and grouped them under four headings: Child factors, Economic factors, Parent factors and School factors.

These factors broadly correspond to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1970), which identified a complex set of factors which influence child and young person’s development. In order to tackle educational disengagement all of these factors need to be taken into account and an adequate intervention put in place. In relation to school and AEP this means adoption of an approach which emphasises the creation of ‘a safe, supportive and caring school environment, inclusiveness and a student-centred philosophy that focuses on the whole student (personal, social and academic)...’ (De Jong, 2005; McPartland, 1994 cited in Hallam and Rogers, 2008: 12-13).

Cooper (1999: 239) suggested that ‘... whilst biology may create propensities for certain social and behavioural outcomes, biology is always mediated by environment and culture.’ He suggested that if we were to meet the needs of children and young people who experience SEBDs then we have to understand biological, psychological and social influences which affect behaviour.

Sodha and Margo (2010) also expressed concerns that these risk factors for disengagement manifest themselves early in a child’s life. They stated that ‘... there is some evidence that boys, in particular, can become disengaged from their learning as young as 9 and 10, or even earlier’ (Horgan, 2007 cited in Sodha and Margo, 2010: 35). They recommended that a preventative approach would be more effective than a remedial approach to disengagement which is ‘ineffective and inefficient’. (pg. 37).

Hallam and Rogers (2008) reviewed national and international policies and practices relating to behaviour management and transition between primary and secondary schools (for example, the Behaviour Improvement Programme; the Primary Behaviour and Attendance Pilot; Behaviour and Education Support Teams; lead Behaviour Professionals). In their book, they addressed the issues relating to ‘sustaining the interest of children in formal education, improving their attendance at school, and their behaviour and motivation when they are there.’ (Hallam and Rogers.

2008: 3). They considered that the major cause of a rise in exclusions in the 1990s was ‘the 1988 Education Act which introduced the publication of league tables and widened the concept of parental choice.’ (pg. 7). They blamed the adoption of a quasi-market in education and focus on overall performance of schools, which was measured through results in national tests and examinations, for making children at risk of poor attainment or exclusion less desirable to be retained in schools (Wright et al, 2000 cited in Hallam and Rogers, 2008: 7). They identified that the age 13-14 was the most critical age for exclusion. In addition to this, pupils with statements of SEN were stated as three times more likely to be excluded than those with no SEN. They wrote that there was a positive relationship between eligibility for free school meals and exclusion rates and that the schools with the highest rates of exclusions tended to have higher proportions of pupils with SEN and low levels of pupil attainment. The differences in exclusion rates between similar schools were explained in the attitude of staff and in particular those of the senior management team and head teachers (pg. 7). Office of National Statistics (2005) indicated that the most common reason for permanent exclusion was persistent disruptive behaviour. Based on research findings, Hallam and Rogers recognised that the causes of poor behaviour and attendance at school were complex and multifaceted and ‘operating at the level of society, subgroups within it, the family, the school, peer groups and the individual’ (Red, 1999; Edward and Malcolm, 2002 cited in Hallam and Rogers, 2008: 25).

The findings from BIP and the Primary Behaviour and Attendance Pilot projects and other research indicated how schools, Local Authorities (LAs) and other agencies could work together to enhance educational outcomes of the pupils who were at risk of developing SEBD and being excluded from main stream education. The BIP involved the LAs’ support for selected secondary schools and their feeder primary schools in relation to the development of whole-school approaches in promoting good behaviour; support for individual pupils who were at risk of developing behaviour problems; meeting the needs of pupils who were at risk of disaffection through innovative approaches to teaching and learning; providing a range of services, activities and learning opportunities for pupils, their families and the wider community within school premises; introducing Behaviour and Education Support Teams (BESTs) that offered the full range of specialist support for these young people and their families and basing police on the school site to work with school staff. These interventions showed that the programme had a positive impact on the status of

behaviour and pastoral issues in school; school policies and practices; school ethos; school support offered to families; children's behaviour, well-being and learning; relationships with parents, staff stress; and a reduction in time spent managing poor behaviour as well as reduction in fixed-term exclusions. The Primary Behaviour and Attendance Strategy Pilot which took place in 2003/5 involved 25 LAs and it included four strands: the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) strand provided professional development opportunities for all schools within the identified LAs; the school improvement strand focused on support for schools in which behaviour and attendance had been identified as key issues; the curriculum materials or Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) strand providing curriculum work that focused on the social and emotional aspects of learning for all children in pilot schools; and the small group intervention strand comprising of group work for children who needed extra help and their parents/carers. The evaluation of the pilot indicated that it had 'a significant impact on behaviour in the participating schools, the working climate in the school, children's well-being, confidence, communication skills, social skills and control of emotions... and some impact was reported on learning and home-school relationships'. These findings suggest that an early intervention approach which places emphasis on different systems which impact young people's development had positive outcomes for the most vulnerable young people.

## 2.6 EDUCATION OUTSIDE (OF) TRADITIONAL MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS - AN INVESTIGATION INTO STUDIES ON ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROVISIONS (AEPs)

In addition to reviewing government policies targeted at school exclusions, which call for alternative approaches to engaging young people who experience SEBD, it is necessary to examine evaluation studies on alternative educational programmes, to determine how effective they are in addressing students' needs, recording their academic achievement and progression in the longer-term.

Evaluation studies on AEPs showed that these types of educational settings were often more supportive, nurturing and challenging for pupils experiencing SEBD than that in



some mainstream schools (e.g. Macnab et al, 2008; Lovering et al, 2006; McNeil and Smith, 2004; Kinder and Kendall, 2003; Reid, 2002, 2003; Morris, 1996). These studies also described good practices adopted by alternative educational provisions in dealing with students disengaged from education.

Macnab et al (2008) aimed to identify and examine practice and provision for young people aged between 14 and 16 years experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who have been placed in colleges of further education

Ten colleges which provided some form of educational provision for under 16 year-olds were visited. The provision ranged from unstructured programmes (sometimes provided on an ad hoc basis) to organised school links and European Funded Programmes. The case studies of colleges described practice and provision in further education for students with SEBD. The general aim of provisions was to provide suitable educational programmes that offered a broader choice of educational activities than mainstream school and help to stimulate, re-motivate and re-engage young people with education. The research highlighted a number of issues faced by the staff working with these young people in further education: college culture, managed transfers and the lack of appeal of teaching 14- to 16-year-olds. The treatment of these young people as adults, differences in the social ambience of college compared to mainstream schools, the informality of the further education environment, the employment of varied teaching methods and encouragement to building positive relationships with adults, were seen as a positive influence on the young people's behaviour and attitudes. The authors noted the need for 'skilled and committed adults' to build relationships with these young people in order to promote social inclusion and argued that this work would require professional development for staff but would have real benefits for the young people concerned.

Lovering et al (2006) evaluated Scallywags, a community-based, early intervention programme for young children (aged 3-7) with behavioural, emotional and social problems. The findings highlighted the potential of such programme to tackle the needs of these children and families, and to help prevent longer-term problems associated with the early onset of behavioural problems, including social exclusion, antisocial behaviour and educational failure. A multi-agency approach to the programme was developed as prioritised within *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury,

2003a), and it was designed on the basis of research evidence of what works with children experiencing SEBD and their parents. The research findings suggested that participation in the Scallywags intervention programme was associated with a reduction in children's difficulties at home and school. The study also suggested that classroom-based support for teachers could be linked to resolving specific problem behaviours rather than generic learning needs. The combination of an intensive, community-based programme linking home and school, whilst providing skilled, flexible and practical support and advice, filled a real gap in early intervention provision for these children.

McNeil and Smith (2004) conducted an action research project that aimed to identify practices, materials and resources being used to develop the literacy, language and numeracy skills of socially excluded young adults. They wanted to find out the success factors for working informally and non-formally in this area. The research included 25 project visits, eight of which were selected to be investigated as in-depth case studies. They found that the main problem for practitioners working in this area was overcoming the barriers to young people's learning and engagement. The project visits identified common issues and themes that practitioners had faced across projects, regardless of sector, location or the style of provision. They identified that most of these projects were employing formal, non-formal and informal approaches to teaching and learning, resulting in a variety of mixed forms of delivery that reflected the needs and pressures in each setting. Rather than being situated within formal educational environments, projects were usually located within community premises. Many practitioners did not employ the traditional teacher/pupil hierarchical relationship.

Kendall et al (2003) evaluated six alternative education initiatives (AEIs) which were aimed at young people who had been permanently excluded or were not attending school for other reasons. They measured the effectiveness in relation to the successful return of pupils to mainstream education, educational attainment, post-16 outcomes and reducing anti-social behaviour including offending. The AEIs aimed at establishing adult-like relationships with pupils and concentrated on pastoral care. The educational programmes they offered allowed young people to experience

success and were sufficiently flexible to take into account the changing needs and circumstances of the young people who attended the projects.

The researchers found that approximately half of all the young people registered at the AEIs during the evaluation were awarded some form of accreditation, there was a change in young people's attitudes towards learning, an improvement in their behaviour and family relationships, and better relationships with project staff than with those in school. Attendance of nearly half of the sample was better during the course of the evaluation than it had been in the previous year. The young people also showed a more positive attitude to the future in relation to employment, college and training.

Student destinations were monitored and the majority of those involved in the NFER study went on to education and training or employment. However, there was still a significant minority who had unknown destinations and it was recommended that all AEI leavers, especially those leaving during the academic year, needed to be monitored more carefully. The key issue was the support available to students once they left the projects.

Reid (2003) provided an evaluation of the Mountain Ash Partnership Out-of-school-hours Learning Project (MAP) from the pupils' perspectives. The findings supported the view that alternative curriculum schemes can significantly change and improve disadvantaged pupils' attitudes towards learning and how they perceive their schools. The project aimed to promote self-esteem, self-efficacy, communications and social skills alongside good mental and physical health in pupils between the ages of 8 and 16 who were showing signs of disaffection or withdrawal from school. These signs were identified as truancy, absenteeism, frequent misbehaviour, poor attitude in class, refusal to take part in school activities and failure to achieve academic potential. The project offered the opportunity to parents to learn new skills alongside their children. A very high percentage of pupils came from deprived home backgrounds and lacked confidence in their own abilities. Thirty-four per cent of the pupils received free school meals. In the area, seventeen per cent of the male and female population between ages 16 and 24 were unemployed.

The project was predicated on the assumption that social disadvantage leads to educational disadvantage which then leads to further social disadvantage. It employed a significant number of out-of-school-hours support staff including learning mentors and home-school tutors who worked with the pupils in a practical manner, and, in certain cases, their caring professionals, parents or other relatives. Pupils were able to select from the following activities: arts and sports programmes, ICT schemes, homework clubs, multi-media activities, cyber cycle, lads and dads club, crime prevention, family learning, photography, wildfire programmes, outdoor pursuits, and annual camps. There was evidence that the project had a positive effect upon both attendance and pupils' behaviour in class. It began to extend some pupils' goals and long-term aspirations. It also showed that 'there is an urgent need to find ways of linking the national curriculum and the alternative curriculum into a better and more synergistic framework' (Reid, 2002).

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

The educational future of many young people excluded from school is questionable as many of them may remain out of the educational system for long periods of time. Moreover, there is a concern that a small proportion of permanently excluded pupils simply disappear from the educational system. It is easy to understand then that there is both a need for alternative provision and that the quality of this provision needs to be continuously evaluated.

The New Labour Government recognised the need for a variety of educational settings for 14- to 16-year-olds rather than just education in mainstream school (Cooper, 2001). Many young people in this age group view GCSEs as lacking relevance for their future which in some cases may lead to disaffection, underachievement and truancy (Bayliss, 1999; Cullen et al., 2000). Pupils are 'turned off' by their experiences of secondary education (DfES, 2003b). Over two decades ago, the Elton Report (1989) recognised alternative education programmes as important in providing education and meeting student needs outside mainstream school. It also emphasised the importance of leadership, whole-school behaviour

policies, classroom management skills, and challenging but appropriate and differentiated curriculum delivery.

Soan (2006: 211) quoted Bronfenbrenner (1970) who ‘felt it was vital for a national approach to ‘joined-up’, collaborative working... neither in our communities nor in the nation as whole, is there a single agency that is charged with the responsibility of assessing or improving the situation of the child in his total environment.’

Apart from considering the immediate educational sphere, other circumstances need to be accounted for such as disadvantages both from physical and emotional perspectives, because they affect a child's chances to achieve.

Although the types of provision in the studies investigated above were different, common characteristics were found: the provision was small in size, it involved closer interaction between teachers and students, a supportive environment, the curriculum was relevant to students and it was flexible, with an emphasis on the personal, social and academic development of young people.

The aim of this chapter was to examine the approaches and practices employed in alternative educational provisions and to identify the complex needs of the young people who are educated in these provisions. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology used in the investigation of such educational provision. The discussion on commonalities and differences in these studies then follows with a view to answering the research question: ‘What type of provision caters for the needs of disaffected young people and successfully re-engages them with education’.

## CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews key issues associated with the research methodology which has been used in this study. The first section discusses the theoretical framework which underpins the study and the research questions posed by the study. The second section describes the rationale for the research design and the research methods which have been used to gather data. It also outlines the research procedure used for conducting the study. The third section considers ethical issues, which could arise in the study and how they have been resolved, with a particular focus on my role as an internal researcher. Finally, the way of reporting the research findings is described.

### 3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research is to examine an alternative educational programme (AEP) for KS4 students who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), assess the New Horizons Programme's (NHP) context, processes and inputs, and its effectiveness in terms of students' attendance, retention and progression post-16. In particular, the intention is to explore what type of educational provision caters for the needs of these students. This necessitates the adoption of a theoretical framework which considers the multifaceted nature and causes of disaffection. It also requires an explanation of wider contextual factors such as the 14-19 educational system and its impact on disengagement of these young people, as well as the examination of quality of alternative curricula programmes that are offered to them once they are excluded from mainstream education.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) identified a variety of environmental systems which affect human behaviour. It posits the developing person at the centre of and entrenched in several environmental systems, ranging from micro-systems i.e. immediate settings such as the family, peers and school to macro- and exo-systems which are more remote contexts such as the educational system, social class context and broader culture. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that the development of the child is likely to be optimised by strong supportive connections between micro-systems.

These interactions constitute meso-system which encompasses the connections and interrelationships among micro-systems (e.g. family, school, peer group) and the individual. Finally, the chrono-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994) represents a temporal dimension which emphasizes that changes in the child (e.g. puberty, adolescence as a transitory period) or in any of the ecological contexts of development (e.g. stressful events at home, school) can also affect the direction that the development is likely to take.

Earlier research which I conducted on the NHP (Cajic, 2004) with a different cohort of disaffected students, concentrated on factors causing disaffection. The findings from this research indicated the following risk factors within micro- and chrono-systems: family, peers and adolescence as an important phase in the development of young people. This research takes a wider perspective and includes a deeper examination of micro- and meso-systems - the educational experiences of young people on the NHP and previously in school as well as the effects of exo- and macro-systems such as the role of Local Authority (LA) and the 14-19 education system in England. The literature review on the education system in Chapter 1 revealed that many young people experience disaffection at KS4 which has a negative impact on their progression post-16. Later on, as they enter adulthood, many of these young people experience long-term negative outcomes such as unemployment or involvement in crime. Alternative curricula studies examined in Chapter 2 indicated that a multi-agency approach and small provision which offers intensive pastoral care successfully re-engage these young people in education. However, the diversity and quality of these provisions has been questioned.

Figure 3.1 shows how Bronfenbrenner's eco-systems theory, described above, is used to explore the influences of different eco-systems on students' disengagement.

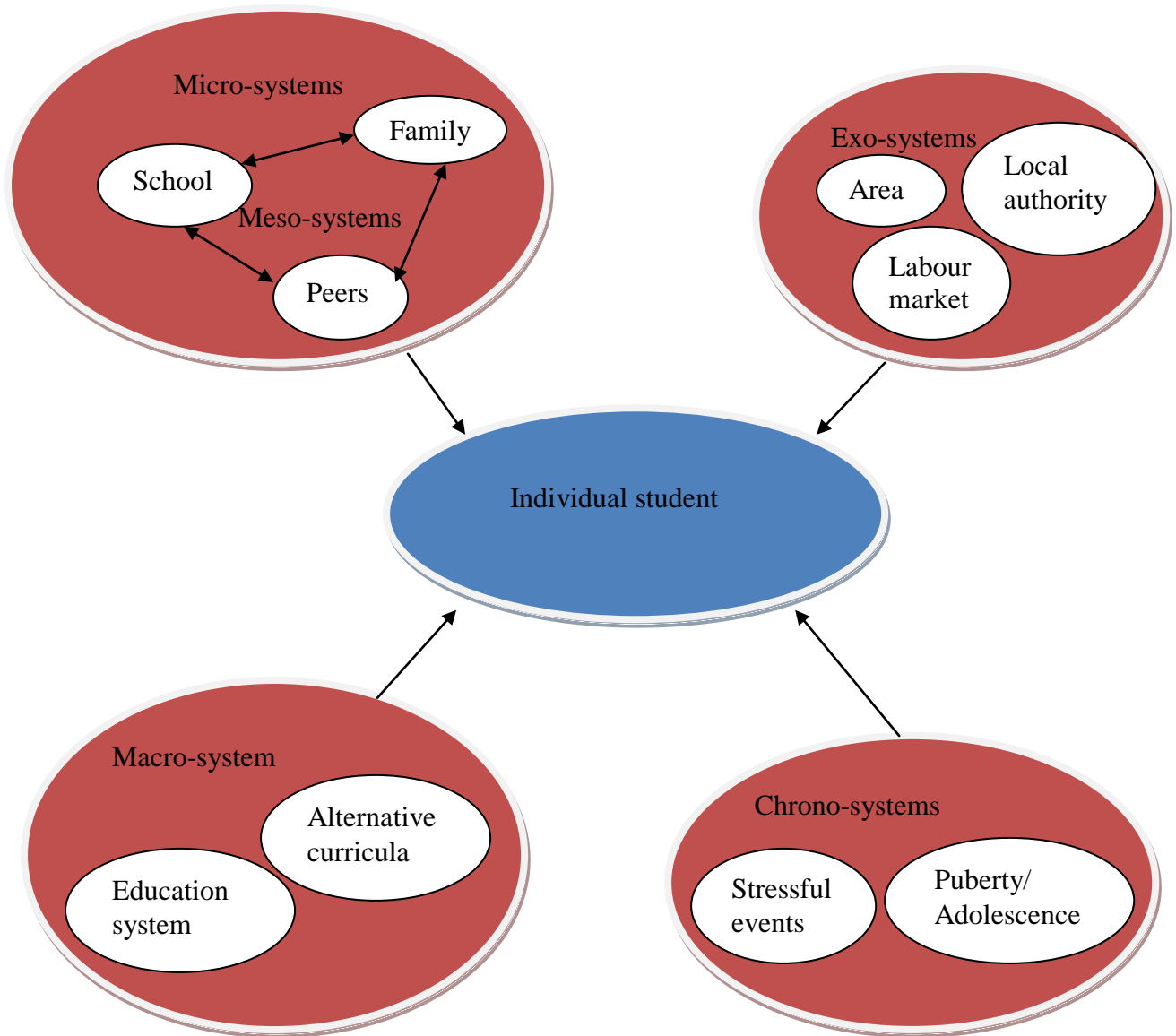


Figure 3.1 – THE APPLICATION OF BRONFENBRENNER’S ECO-SYSTEMS THEORY TO DISAFFECTION WITH EDUCATION

The main research question for this study is whether the NHP is an effective educational provision for disaffected students in terms of both re-engagement with education and successful progression post-16. In order to answer this main research question, the following question has emerged:

- What are the views of the students and NHP staffs involved in the programme on its overall strengths and weaknesses and its ability to re-engage disaffected students and to support them to progress post-16?



### 3.2 CASE STUDY DESIGN

In order to answer these questions, this study adopted a case study design because of its ability to explore complex social settings using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The aim of this study was to assess the extent to which an AEP achieved valued outcomes in terms of students' retention, achievement and progression post-16, and processes by which these outcomes were achieved or not.

The study is concerned with 'the programme' (NHP) as the case. The case study design can be used to document and analyse implementation processes, the outcomes of the programme and the overall effectiveness of the programme (Yin, 2003). Based on Yin's (2009: 44) identification of case study designs, the study adopts the *embedded, single-case design* in which more than one 'unit of analysis' is incorporated into the design. Thus, a case study of the NHP also uses sub-units of individual students. a variety of data collection instruments was used. Figure 2 presents different phases of investigation of the NHP as 'the unit of analysis' and the research methods used in each phase. Figure 3 indicates research methods used in investigation of micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-systems for 'the sub-unit' of students. The embedded, single-case design was used to describe, explore and explain the NHP's processes and outcomes and to explore students' views on its effectiveness, its strengths and weaknesses. It investigated in more depth the reasons why students progressed or not and established cause and effect between the NHP and its impact on individual students.

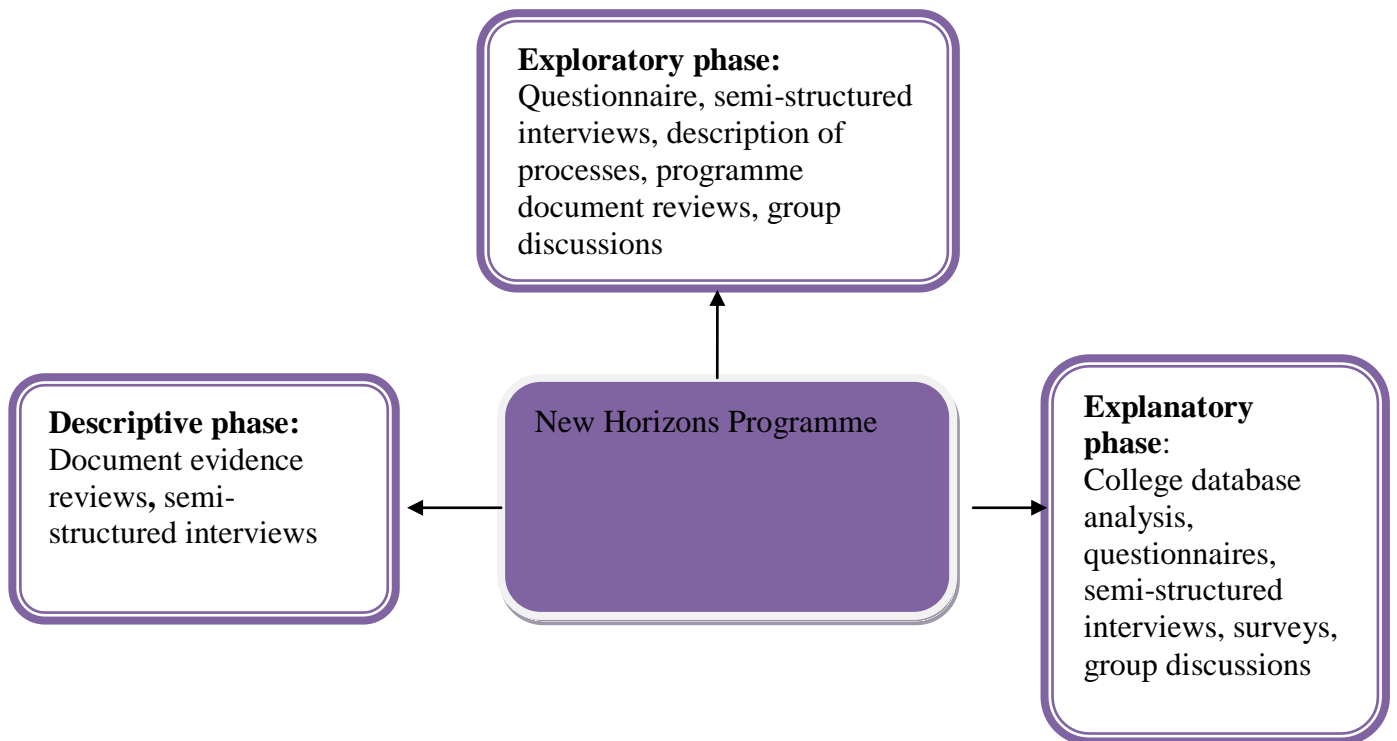


Figure 3.2 – research phases and research methods

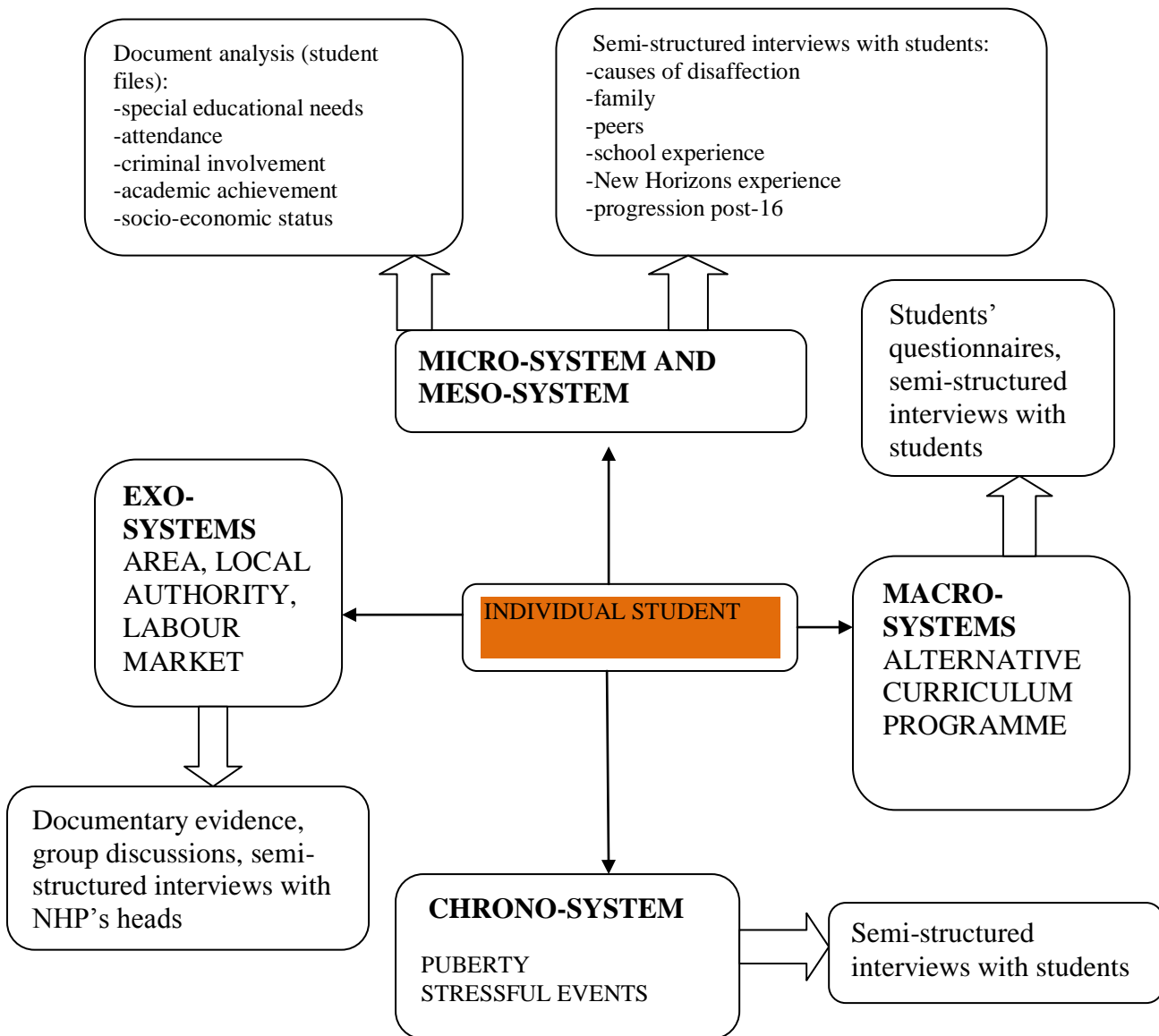


Figure 3.3 – Research methods used in investigation of eco-systems

‘Case study research design is appropriate when investigators either desire or are forced by circumstances a) to define research topics broadly and not narrowly b) to cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and c) to rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence’ (Yin, 2003: 57).

Although the research questions in the present study were generally set in the planning stage of the evaluation, it was expected that, in attempting to answer these initially set questions, further questions and sub-questions would emerge in the process of conducting different research stages within a complex setting of an

educational programme. It was also expected that the study would allow the collection of multiplicity of information which needed to be checked for validity through triangulation of data sources and methods (Flick, 2002).

Nisbet and Watt (1984: 72) indicated that a case study is 'a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle'. Stake (1995: 8) defined it as the study of a 'particular'. This has implications for generalisability which is often claimed to be limited in case studies (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). However, generalisation in case study takes a different form such as generalisation from a single case to a theoretical generalisation where features of the single case may be applied to a multiplicity of cases with the same features. Thus, in later chapters this study aimed to draw commonalities and differences in findings from the examination of features in other studies on alternative educational provisions (AEPs), investigated in Chapter 2.

Yin (2009: 18) stated that 'a case study is a study of a case in a context'. By providing rich and vivid descriptions and details of the NHP, case study can examine situations in ways that are not always possible when statistical analysis is conducted. Case studies recognise the existence of many variables which cannot be isolated. In order to assess and examine the impact of these variables, more than one method for data collection and different sources of evidence are required. Therefore, a key advantage of the case study design is the opportunity afforded for triangulation, and the gathering and comparison of data from a variety of sources to enhance the validity of the findings. Cohen and Manion (1994: 233) defined triangulation 'as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour'. Triangulation enables the researcher to view things 'from a different perspective' (Denscombe, 1998: 85). Cohen and Manion (1994: 233) argued that 'Exclusive reliance on one method, therefore, may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality she is investigating'. The variety of research methods used in this study enabled the internal researcher 'to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint' (p. 233). Therefore, the questionnaire data was compared with semi-structured interviews and documentary studies to provide versatile and authentic views of the NHP effectiveness, its processes and inputs. The process of triangulation of data enabled the researcher to check for consistencies or inconsistencies within the

data and to assess for data validity and ‘authenticity’. It is also useful to address the main weaknesses and biases which could occur in conducting case studies i.e. cross-checking of data. For example, numerical data on students’ retention, attendance, achievement and progression post-16, obtained from a college database, can be easily cross-checked to ensure reliability of this data.

Case studies can also present ideas and theories which are based on real people in real situations to enable the reader to easily understand them. They can explain, describe, illustrate and enlighten (Yin 2009: 19-20). Through an in-depth examination of real contexts, they are able to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions which can establish cause and effect.

The case study design allows researchers to capture the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as programme processes, inputs and outcomes, and individual student’s life cycles (Yin, 2009). Accordingly, Yin (1984) identified three types of case study in terms of their outcomes: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. However, many hold the view that case studies are only appropriate for the exploratory phase of an investigation, that surveys and histories are appropriate for the descriptive phase and that experiments are used for doing explanatory or causal inquiries (e.g., Shavelson and Townes, 2002 cited in Yin, 2003: 3). Disagreeing with this view, Yin advocated that each of these strategies can be used for all three purposes – exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (Yin, 2003). What distinguishes these strategies, according to Yin, is not this hierarchy but the following three conditions: (a) the type of research questions posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.

Table 3.4 is adopted from Yin (2003: 5) and it displays these three conditions showing how each is related to the five major research strategies. I replaced the experiment in my study with semi-structured interviews and history with documentary evidence.

Strategy	Form of Research Question	Requires Control of Behavioural Events?	Focuses on Contemporary Events?
Survey – student questionnaire	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes
Semi-structured interview	How? Why? What?	Yes	Yes
Document analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/No
History	How? Why?	No	No
Case studies of individual students	How? Why?	No	Yes/No

Table 3.4 Relevant Situations for Different Research Strategies

(a) The first condition covers research questions. These can be categorised as ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘how’, and ‘why’. The research questions in this study focus mainly on ‘what’ questions which are exploratory. These types of questions are appropriate for conducting an exploratory study whose goal is to develop hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry (identification of programme processes, inputs and outcomes; investigation of other AEPs to allow generalisation on the topic being researched – what is an appropriate provision/programme for disaffected Key Stage 4 (KS4) students). Research strategies which were used in this study with these types of questions were exploratory surveys and exploratory case studies, archival records analysis in documentary evidence. In relation to the outcomes of the NHP, a survey was designed to enumerate the ‘what’ in these types of questions.

On the other hand, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are more explanatory since they deal with operational links needing to be traced over time. These types of questions were posed in analysing research evidence and establishing causes and effects of the NHP. In the investigation of other alternative educational programmes for disaffected KS4 students and identifying commonalities and differences with the programme in this study, they examined how and why other AEPs cater for similar cohort of students. They were also applied in exploring and explaining individual student’s case studies at the interviewing stage of the research process. They were useful in answering the

questions ‘how’ or ‘why’ the NHP had worked or not. The research strategies used in answering these types of questions are: surveys, student questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and case studies of individual students.

‘Who’ and ‘where’ questions were used for describing the NHP’s context and its implementation, students’ backgrounds and their individual needs. The research strategies which were used with these questions were the analysis of the NHP’s history - documents and records.

b) The consideration of the extent of control which an investigator has over actual behavioural events was an important element in this study due to my role as an internal researcher. The role of an internal researcher is further explored in later sections in this chapter. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggested that the case study approach is appropriate when the researcher has little control over events so behaviours cannot be manipulated or controlled. It was proposed in this study that the NHP staff be involved during all stages of research. The study took into account the views of NHP’s participants and staff as well as views of external agencies. The involvement of the NHP staff in the preliminary stage of research study was undertaken through group discussions which shaped the design of research questions; and identified the themes relevant to the study and sources of evidence and research data to be collected. In addition to this, the study adopted an open communication whereby all research materials were presented to the staff employed on the NHP at the time the research took place and were open to examination by them. As I mentioned earlier in this section, numerical data on the NHP outcomes can be easily cross-checked from the college database. Likewise, the NHP documents are accessible to all the staff, thus the analysis of documentary evidence can also be cross-checked. Particular attention was paid at the interviewing stage when the potential for the researcher’s bias needed to be addressed.

Although direct observations are often advocated to be used in case study research, they were not used in this study due to the possibility of informal manipulation since the NHP staff and I could have been biased in using this strategy. It would have also not been feasible to cross-check data obtained through direct observations due to the fact that research was conducted by an individual rather than a group of investigators

as well as financial constraints. To supplement the study, the secondary data contained in the NHP's documents and records was examined.

c) The case study was used to examine the NHP development over a period of seven years and as such it covered past events as well as contemporary events. The researcher must rely on primary as well as secondary documents as the main sources of evidence. Documentary evidence was used in examination of archival documents and case study for examination of contemporary events. This allowed the researcher to identify how the NHP had developed over the period of time and to detect relevant trends in the NHP outcomes.

### 3.3 Reliability and validity

'The problem of measurement is often addressed by means of the concepts of validity and reliability' (Hammersley, 1983: 73). The reliability and validity of qualitative data depend on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher (Patton, 1990). There may be some overlap between definitions of reliability and validity because their definitions are not clear and subject to interpretation (Hammersley, 1987). Reliability of data collection instruments refers to the extent to which they produce similar results under constant conditions on all occasions (Bell, 1993). Validity of an item is about whether the item measures or describes what is supposed to measure or describe. The question of validity can be described as 'a question of whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees' (Kirk and Miller, 1986: 21). Eisner (1991) suggests that the best researchers can do is to make judgements or interpretations about the validity of research based on evidence collected from data. He suggested 'structural corroboration as a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation or evaluation' (Eisner, 1991: 110). The multi-method approach of this study enhances the validity of the data collected through the process of triangulation. The process of triangulation of data enables the researcher to check for consistencies or inconsistencies within the data and to assess for data validity and 'authenticity' (Robson, 1993, 2002).



To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the research participant bias, the researcher bias and construct validity needed to be addressed. Research participant bias may occur when research participants provide the answers that they think the researcher is seeking or that make them or their educational institution appear more positive. Consideration of researcher bias is important when the researcher is an insider who is closely involved with the case under investigation. Robson (2002) wrote that researchers who conduct case studies needed to remain aware of it during interpretation of data. The difficulties in conducting in-depth case studies and the biases that may arise from a researcher's closeness to the subjects under study were continuously assessed in this case through the adoption of open communication with all the participants in this study and their involvement in data collection and data analysis.

Although a variety of strategies were put in place to alleviate researcher bias my involvement on the NHP and prior knowledge of the subjects under the study may have influenced not only my interpretation of the data but may have also affected the collection process as well. The data collected may have been influenced toward researcher bias as I conducted all the interviews and the participants may have provided feedback that was positive because they wanted to assist me in the study. Therefore, even though I incorporated data collection strategies to alleviate researcher biases, bias may have still influence my findings. Thus, to claim that my own intervention in the educational innovation was completely free of bias and that these biases did not influence the final collection, interpretation and conclusions drawn from the data would be wrong.

### 3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

Within the case study approach of this investigation the following research methods were used:

a) Group discussion with the NHP staff was conducted at the planning stage of research in order to define research questions, data collection materials and NHP's inputs and processes (see Appendix 1 for the group discussion themes); Further group discussion with the NHP's staff was undertaken as new data sources emerged in the

research process;

b) Documentary evidence was examined to describe the NHP's inputs, processes and its outcomes for students.

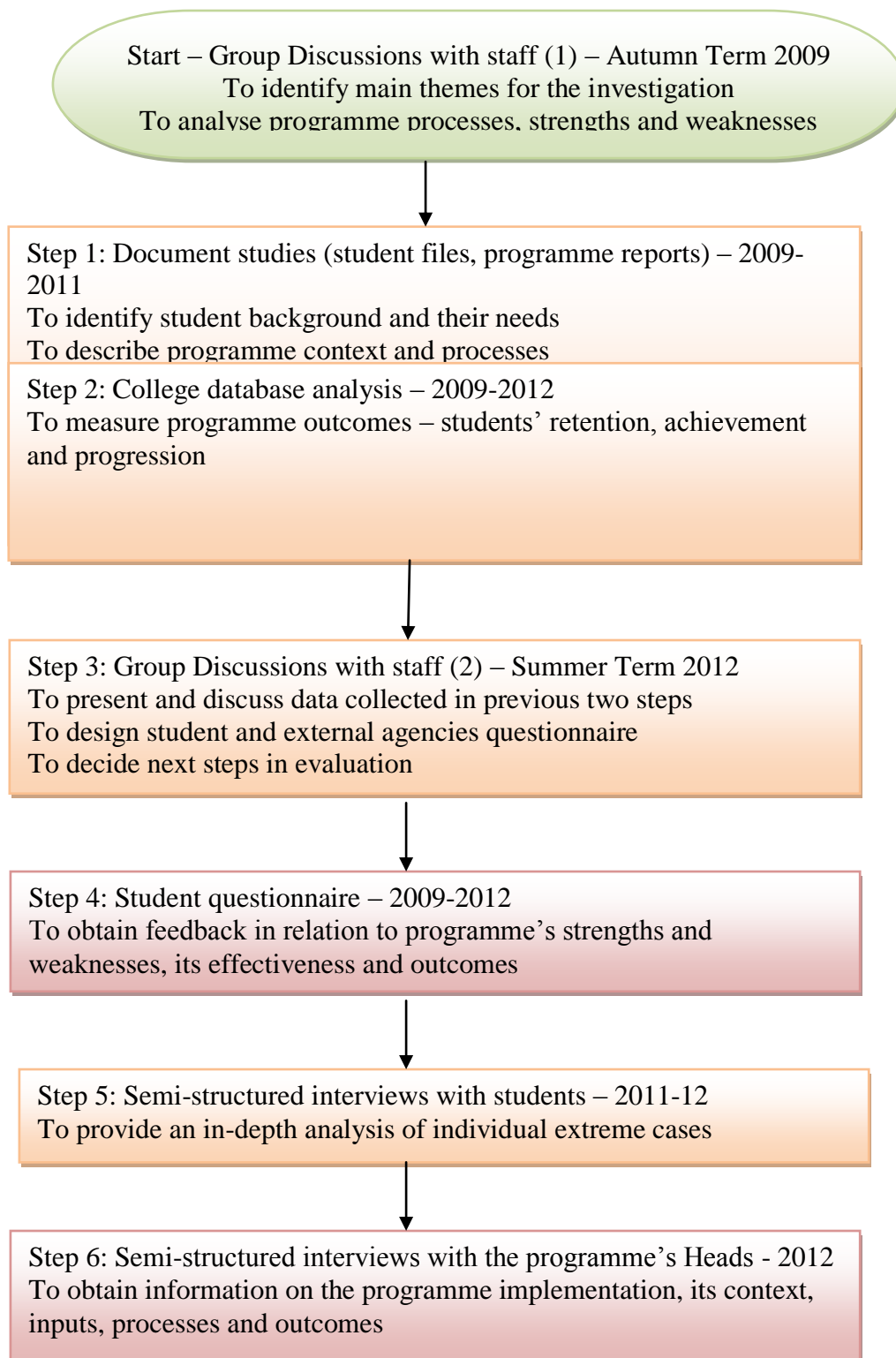
c) A questionnaire was sent to all students to elicit their views about their experiences on the programme (see Appendix 2 for Student Questionnaire);

d) Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3 for semi-structured interviews guide) were carried out with a sample of students from different cohorts exploring issues raised by questionnaire responses. It was planned that students would be selected on the basis of extreme cases – those who have successfully completed the NHP and progressed and those who did not complete or/and progressed. However, this was not possible to achieve since I was unable to contact all the students. Instead all the students that I interviewed completed the NHP successfully. Of those students interviewed some have successfully progressed post-16 and some have not and became NEET;

e) Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 4 for semi-structured interviews guide) were also conducted with the NHP management to investigate their views on the NHP's goals and intentions, inputs, processes and outcomes as well as any external and internal issues which might have affected the NHP's implementation.

These methods are described in more detail in the following sections. The rationale for using each of these methods is also explained as well as the identification of their strengths and weaknesses.

Flowchart 1 indicates the order in which the research was conducted.



Flowchart 3.5 Timeline for data collection

## Document studies

Existing records often provide insights into a setting and a group of people that cannot be observed or noted in another way. This information can be found in document form. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 277) defined a document as ‘any written or recorded material’ not prepared for the purposes of the evaluation or at the request of the inquirer. They divided documents into two major categories: public records and personal documents. Public records are materials created and kept for ‘the purpose of attesting to an event or providing an accounting’ whereas personal documents refer to first-person accounts of events and experiences. For this research, public records were collected within the setting and these internal records included documents such as: student records, Service Level Agreements devised between the LA and referral agencies; schools and institutional mission statements; course reviews; minutes of meetings; institutional history and descriptions of programme development. These documents were useful in describing programme characteristics such as backgrounds and academic performance of students and in identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses. These helped to highlight the programme’s resources, values, objectives, goals, priorities, processes and concerns. They provide a record that is not subject to recall bias since they were not devised or recorded for the purposes of this evaluation. The external records are studies of other AEPs which will assist in gathering information about similar programmes with the view to detecting relevant trends. These findings will be presented and discussed later on in this thesis when analysing data.

Personal documents included student files, interview questionnaires conducted with students at the recruitment and selection stages prior to enrolling on the programme and referral forms. The information gathered from personal documents was used to identify each individual student’s needs and, in the later stages of research, compared to programme processes in order to assess the programme’s strengths and weaknesses and the overall effectiveness of these interventions.

Information from documents was also used to generate student questionnaire and interview questions and identify further data to be collected. Furthermore, existing records can be useful for making comparisons e.g. comparing programme participants with those on other studies, programme goals outlined in SLA, historical comparison

of different cohorts and programme processes and interventions employed for each cohort.

The usefulness of existing sources varies depending on whether they are accessible and accurate. The internal researcher and programme staff have access to these sources, and all the documents and research writing are available to the programme participants and staff. Furthermore, staff have been consulted on the use of all the documents.

Strauss (1987) argued that the basic question facing the social science researcher is how to capture the complexity of reality and then how to convincingly make sense of it. Glaser (1978) asserted that making sense of reality comes from the extensive collection of and subsequent engagement with the data. In order to achieve this, the researcher in this study employed diverse approaches (e.g. group discussions, semi-structured interviews, surveys/questionnaires and documentary/archival data). The application of effective theory at various levels of generality is based on analysis of the data. It is only by grounding the theory in data that it will become effective in addressing the issues under investigation.

Strauss (1987) argued that research is basically a set of tasks, both physical and conceptual, carried out by researchers and that data analysis can be enhanced by thinking specifically of the basic set of tasks associated with research. This chapter describes in detail how these basic tasks were used to collect and analyse data during different phases of research procedure.

### 3.4.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 276) wrote that ‘Documents and records are singularly useful sources of information, although they have often been ignored, particularly in basic research and in evaluation.’ Despite the importance of documentary evidence for contemporary societies, ‘British and American social scientists have never been entirely confident about analysing written texts (Silverman, 2004: 153) but rather the methods are focused on the analysis of speech and action. Silverman argued that ‘the mere act of transcription of an interview turns it into a written text’. Documents are often seen as inappropriate or secondary sources, unable to indicate sufficient insight into systems of social meaning and practice. Further, many researchers are cautious about using documents in education research, given uncertainties about the most appropriate strategies to use and the limited guidance available in much of the qualitative methodological literature (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 231-232). Yin (2009) wrote that documentary evidence is relevant to every case study. The examination of documentary evidence in the case study of an educational programme is used as a resource to get a comprehensive and objective picture of how the programme operates in practice and how is implemented (Silverman, 2001).

This section describes how the documentary evidence is used in qualitative educational research, as supplementary and contextual source of data (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). This discussion includes the nature of documents, distinctive dimensions of research with documents, the approach to analyse documentary evidence and how this documentary evidence is used to supplement other data collected in this study to develop a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the programme, its setting, processes and outcomes.

## DEFINITION OF DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS

The definitions of the terms 'document' and 'records' often overlap and they are used interchangeably. In the Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge Dictionaries on-line, accessed 09/2009), 'document is defined as 'a paper or set of papers with written or printed information, especially of an official type'; 'a text that is written and stored on a computer. Similarly 'record is defined as 'a piece of information or a description of an event which is written on paper or stored on a computer'; 'the facts that are known about a person or a company and the actions they have done in the past'.

Guba and Lincoln (1985: 277) defined 'document' as 'any written or recorded material other than a record that was not prepared specifically in response to a request from the inquirer'. They used the term 'record' to identify 'any written or recorded statement prepared by or for an individual or organisation for the purpose of attesting to an event or providing an accounting'.

Apart from the difficulty in defining these terms, Guba and Lincoln (1981: 229) further distinguished the different typologies of documents and records. For the purposes of this study, only relevant typologies are mentioned here: primary and secondary evidence - all the documentary evidence (this term refers to both documents and records) examined in this study is primary which means that it was generated from the direct experience of 'a particular situation or event' rather than from other sources (not someone's description or summary of them). This is important in checking the authenticity, verification, reliability and objectivity of documentary evidence. Linked to this is another typology that is important to this study and that is solicited versus unsolicited (controlled or imposed by someone), comprehensive versus limited (in the case when documentary evidence is limited for confidentiality reasons e.g. in staff meetings students' initials are used so this document was only analysed for the meeting agenda topics rather than the contents of the actual minutes), edited versus unedited (controlled for contents) (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975 cited in Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 229).

In choosing the definition of documents and records and identifying the typologies of these terms, it is important to refer back to the objectives set in this phase of research

which is essentially descriptive. The documentary evidence provides the information on the context of the programme, its aims and objectives, its outcomes, its participants, description of their needs and how these needs are addressed by the programme processes, resources and outcomes. This will inform the research question 3 posed by this study: ‘How can Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory guide an examination of an alternative educational programme?’ It will also assess ‘How effective is the NHP in catering for students’ needs and tackling their disengagement?’ which emerged as a sub question.

For the purposes of the current study, the term ‘record’ will be used to describe any written material created by the Local Authority or Senior Management and in which the staff and programme management did not have an input. The term ‘document’ will be used to denote any written material in creation of which the programme staff and management have had their input. I have chosen this classification in order to minimise biases which could potentially arise due to my involvement on the programme. Hence, a researcher in education should be open to different perspectives and viewpoints to ensure comprehensive examination of educational programme to check for quality.

#### THE ADVANTAGES OF USING DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

In the context of an internal researcher, there are many advantages of using documentary evidence. First, it is easily accessible since all the programme documents examined in this study have been open for examination to all the teaching staff members not only the researcher. Second, it is an inexpensive source of evidence demanding mostly researcher’s time, effort and patience. Third, it is appealing to the internal researcher due to its stability as a source of information in terms of accuracy, authenticity and unchangeability over a period of time so that it can be re-examined by other researchers. Fourth, it is an invaluable source of information ‘grounded’ in the context of the programme since some documents have been specifically designed for the programme or adapted to the context of the programme and its participants (such as ‘Student Programme Reviews’, ‘Interview checklist’, Individual Learning Plans’, Student File’) by the programme staff or in consultation with the staff. Finally,



it is an 'unobtrusive' source of evidence which was 'not created as a result of the case study and as such it cannot be altered by the researcher' and thus 'contaminated' by the potential biases (Yin, 2009: 102).

The study of documents provides access to events that cannot be observed, to examples of formal communication about the programme processes, and to social actors that generate meanings and practices. By comparison with qualitative research of live talk and action, in which researchers must actively generate new social data, the pre-existing status of documentary evidence makes them distinctive and results in the need for explicit attention to document selection, and to the intended nature of these textual resources. They are not produced by the researcher or for this study so they are less biased. For this reason, they were reviewed and selected by the programme staff during group discussions.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) criticised the exclusion of scientists from the research process in conducting experiments. Thus, one could argue that the insider researcher is in a more advantageous position because she has access to the programme so she can conduct naturalistic observation. However, Bronfenbrenner (1977:79) argued that this is only possible 'with the stipulation that it be unguided by any hypotheses formulated in advance and uncontaminated by structured experimental designs imposed prior to data collection'. Thus, in order to avoid imposing any hypotheses that she formulated in the course of her involvement on the programme, in the present study instead of observations, the researcher decided to consult the staff on the most relevant and credible approaches to data collection during group discussion 1. Guba and Lincoln (1981: 232) asserted that documents and records represent a 'natural' source of information, they described them as an 'in context' source of information which 'arises from the context [and], exist in it but they consist of information about the context'. As such, they contain 'well-grounded data' on the different aspects of the NHP that is being investigated. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the world from a participant's point of view, by listening to or observing a person in a natural environment. By using documents, a researcher is placed 'at some distance from real people, so that human action and thought are interpreted through representations of reality' (Silverman, 2001: 154). However, Yin (2009) suggested that documents can 'corroborate information from other sources. As such documents can be used as

important resources for data triangulation, to increase the comprehensiveness and validity of any single study (Patton, 2002: 248).

## THE PURPOSE OF DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS

Documentary evidence is not produced as an independent personal act but in ways that draw on and relate to other documents. Therefore, the researcher needs to examine why they were made, for what purpose and by whom.

Documentary evidence in this study is a specific type of formal communication and networking amongst the programme staff, management and students within the programme as well as outside of programme with the external agencies interested in the programme, such as parents, referral agencies and the LA. This means that documentary evidence shows the competence, and often the specialized knowledge, of their producers. Their form and content conforms with clear rules (Bauer, Gaskell, & Allum, 2000), such as the rules of collaboration agreement or institutional policies in this study. Documentary evidence is used to record and reflect social arrangements; organisation of social life on the programme, its processes, inputs, outcomes and assess the achievement of aims, objectives and set targets.

Documents and records are not simply containers of meaning. They are actively and collectively produced, exchanged, and used. The production of documents and records involves many decisions, by different people, about what information to write, in what style, for what audience, and for what purpose. They are produced in and reflect specific social and historical circumstances. In this study they are used as supplementary and contextual data to ensure objectivity, validity and reliability of evidence collected through other methods.

The analysis of documentary evidence allows for minimal researcher intrusion. This is an important resource for an internal researcher for whom observation could alter rather than illuminate the social world.

## SAMPLING STRATEGIES

The purpose of the current study is to provide an in-depth account of the programme in its context, its implementation, processes, inputs and outcomes. Quantitative researchers sample randomly, to permit generalization, but qualitative researchers sample information-rich cases, to permit in-depth understanding (Patton, 2002). Although generalisations can be made with the aim of providing recommendations for the development and improvement of other educational programmes of a similar context, the primary aim of this study is to provide a detailed investigation of the NHP.

The selection strategy applied in the analysis of documentary evidence in this study is purposeful sampling. This strategy is used to identify attributes other than the individuals themselves for investigation of processes and practices, assessment of programme weaknesses and strengths and implementation of the programme. A purposeful sampling strategy yields information-rich documentary evidence to exemplify actions or situations that are extreme or intense, to demonstrate maximum variation or homogeneity, or to identify typical or critical cases (Patton, 2002). Legal documentary evidence, college policies and programme-specific documentary evidence are unique information about processes on the NHP.

The selection strategy was structured for comprehensiveness. The researcher purposefully selected the most information-rich and appropriate sources in relation to the goals of the research. The selection strategy provides a systematic process and theoretic rationale for choosing among the plethora of available documentary sources. This study draws on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and in accordance with this theory aims to capture all documents and exchanges from different agencies in order to assess the relationships between different systems.

Since these textual resources are socially produced beyond the control of researchers, the researcher must attend to selecting available documents, considering what documents are not available, and conducting some degree of 'source criticism' of the selected documents (Howell and Prevenier, 2001). Source criticism has both external and internal dimensions. External critiques to establish authenticity and accuracy are technical including consideration of where, when, and by whom a source was created. Internal critiques establish how a source can inform, by considering intentions and abilities of the document's producers.

## THE EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The examination of documentary evidence formed a descriptive phase of the research procedure. The examination of documentary evidence requires analysis and interpretation. Robson defined it literally as 'breaking up of something complex into smaller parts and explaining the whole in terms of the properties of, and relations between, these parts' (Robson, 2011: 412).

Many analytic strategies are available for qualitative interpretation of documents. Atkinson et al. (2001) suggested the following two analytic strategies in qualitative research: content analytic strategies which focus on sources as independent containers of fixed evidence about the social world, and context analytic strategies which focus on sources in ways that embed them in the social contexts of their production and use. For analysis of documents, two distinctive approaches were adopted: (a) the analysis of documents for their content (content analytic) and (b) the analysis of documents as commentary (context analytic)

Although content analysis is a type of inductive analysis for researchers who work with live talk and action, these techniques and theories are adapted in this study for the qualitative content analysis of documents (Altheide, 1996). The term content analysis indicates a range of qualitative analytic strategies to "identify core consistencies and meanings" in a volume of qualitative data (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Content analysis is used to elucidate key patterns, themes, and categories, drawing on previous research, theoretical considerations and research questions.

Researchers who use documents as commentary can adopt a variety of analytic strategies, depending on the research questions they pose, and several analytic approaches are used in this study: description; theoretical presuppositions to structure data analysis; careful attention to alternate or contrary examples or explanations; and the use of multiple types of documents or sources of data for triangulation (Yin, 2003). The analysis of documents as commentary requires significant attention to their socially exchanged and produced nature.

## THE ANALYTIC PROCEDURE

Following the outline of the research proposal by the researcher and the initially set research questions, it was agreed in group discussion 1 that the first step in the data collection should be the examination and analysis of documentary evidence that is available to all the staff participants involved in this research.

Robson (2002) recommended that the documents and records needed to be repeatedly read for meanings and patterns. The documentary evidence was collected and analysed using a thematic coding approach. This approach involves '*coding and labelling*' of all or parts of data to identify whether they represented something of potential interest for this research study and how these data related to the ideas and/or theory about these data (Robson, 2002: 467). The content of the entire data was examined and coded for the specific features of the documents and records. These included their headings, strategies, practices, activities, procedures, tactics and meanings – what aims, objectives, targets, norms, rules, and values guide their action. The initial codes were generated. Codes refer to 'the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1998: 63).

Codes with the similar label were then grouped together as a *theme*. Boyatzis (1998: 5) defined a theme as 'a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon'. In the first instance, codes and themes occurring in the data were determined inductively from reviewing the data. In further analysis and interpretation of the data, themes were generated deductively from the research questions posed by

this study, previous research on AEPs and theoretical perspective adopted by this study. The themes were then compared and analysed in all the documents and records that were examined (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in Guba, 1984: 339). Through these comparisons of the themes re-occurring in different sources of documentary evidence, the important features employed on the programme were inferred to explore and describe the programme processes and to assess its strengths and weaknesses. These codes and themes were then presented in a table to enable easier identification of the themes (see tables 4.1- 4.4 in Chapter 4, section 4.2).

In addition to this, the documentary evidence used to record programme aims, objectives and targets; students' progression and the programme processes was examined in terms of the following questions: who designed the documentary evidence, the purpose for which it was made, how was it recorded, who checked it, was it edited, who has access to them, when and how often was it produced. This explains how documentary evidence relates to each other and checks the authenticity of it. Following this, all documentary evidence was divided based on whether it was solicited, comprehensive or edited and whether the programme staff had an input in their creation. The implications of the above were addressed in the discussion on each document and record in Chapter 4.

### 3.4.2 Questionnaires

The purpose of a student questionnaire was to gain students' views about their experiences on the programme and to identify their destinations after completing the programme. Cohen and Manion (1994) asserted that sequencing of questions is of paramount importance so that researchers are able 'to anticipate the type and range of responses that their questions are likely to elicit' (pg. 93). Oppenheim further suggested that 'The questionnaire has a job to do: its function is measurement (Oppenheim, 1992, pg 100). In this study the student questionnaire was used to measure the overall impact of different aspects of the programme on students' progression in terms of achievement and future progression.

I initially drafted a list of questions based on findings from the analysis of documentary evidence and group discussion 1. They also related to the key research questions outlined in the planning stage of the research. The questions were then presented to and discussed with the programme staff during group discussion 2 and the student questionnaire was finalised.

The questionnaire included a consent form and information about the research and its intended outcomes to provide an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity for students and to express thanks for their participation in the study. The final questionnaire included questions on the following broad areas: students' experience of college environment and education on the Programme, the support they received by the Programme staff, the quality of teaching, teachers' ability to manage students' behaviour and to motivate them to learn, the relevance of qualifications they achieved and their impact on students' progression post-16, the main strengths and weaknesses of the Programme and suggestions for its improvement.

The questionnaire was administered in college to the last two cohorts of students examined in this study. It was sent to the rest of the students who had completed the programme in previous academic years. The difficulty that arose with administering students' questionnaires was the response rate. This was resolved through follow-up telephone calls.

The questionnaire was not piloted, except through discussion with fellow staff. I found that when it was administered by the programme staff, either in college or over the phone, the respondents provided more comments to the open questions in the questionnaire than did the students who simply had it mailed their homes and completed it there. This could be because the students in college felt more duty bound to complete the questionnaires since they were to a certain extent being overseen or mediated by staff and the students had dedicated time to complete this task. Alternatively, it may be that because they were closer to the programme in terms of time, they were more able to give fuller answers. This experience has led me to consider that in future it would be better to pilot a questionnaire more extensively and also to consider the way that the questionnaire is administered.

The questionnaire responses were entered onto a data matrix (see tables 6.1-6.10 in Chapter 6, section 6.2). This provided a framework within which the data was viewed

as a whole. After this initial analysis of data, emerging themes which related to research questions were developed (see section 6.2-6.4 in Chapter 6). These themes helped in selecting the students for interviewing and in focusing the questions for these interviews.

### 3.4.3 Group discussions

Blumer holds that ‘A small number of individuals, brought together as a discussion or resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample. Such a group, discussing collectively their sphere of life and probing into it as they meet another’s disagreements, will do more to lift the veils covering the sphere of life than any other device that I know of’ (1969: 41). The stimulation of a discussion and the dynamic developing in it are used as the central source of knowledge. Here the group becomes a tool for reconstructing individual opinions more appropriately but also allows development of a shared group opinion which goes beyond individuals’ opinion. They correspond to the way in which opinions are produced, expressed and exchanged in everyday life.

In this study, the discussion on specific topics which relate to research questions occurred in a natural group, within the programme staff. They were concerned by the issue of the group discussion due to their involvement with the programme. In order to prevent any biasing influence on the discussion in process, I avoided moderation of discussion. At the beginning of the discussion, the main purposes of the discussion were explained. The actual discussion started with a ‘discussion stimulus’ (Krueger, 1988: 100) which unfolded a concrete problem for which a solution is to be found.

Group discussions were audio taped and then transcribed using theoretical coding which is described in a more detail in Chapter 5, section 5.3 and 5.5.

### 3.4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

In this study, I chose semi-structured interviews over standardised interviews because they do not restrict sequencing or how topics should be dealt with but rather reflect a conversational style between the researcher and the subject around some key issues



raised by the research. The aim of this type of interview 'is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective' (Patton, 1990: 278). The interviewer invites 'Interviewees to 'speak their minds' (Denscombe, 1995: 113) by 'introducing a theme or topic and then letting the interviewee develop his or her ideas'. Using semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to 'focus' the interview and provide 'more control about the kinds of questions used and seek also to limit the discussion to certain parts of the respondent's experience' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 289).

In this study, the interviews with students were aimed at developing an understanding of their perspectives on the NHP's contexts, inputs and processes, and the impact the programme might have had on their educational experiences and further progression. The list of topics relevant to this study thus centred on the issues of effectiveness of the NHP in meeting students' needs, its impact on their achievements and future destinations. The interview schedule was linked to the issues around the key research questions which emanated from the student questionnaires which were conducted prior to the interviews.

I intended to interview a number of students who represented extreme cases i.e. those students who successfully completed the NHP and progression to post-16 education, training or employment, those who had successfully completed the NHP but did not succeed in progressing post-16 and ended up as NEET; and those students who dropped out from the NHP. I interviewed students from the first two groups but I was unable to establish contact with the students from the third group. The interview data provided case studies for individual students which explained students' background, their experiences with education and causes of disaffection within it.

The interviews with the programme management (two Heads of the NHP, the Head at the time the research had commenced and previous Head of the NHP who also set it up) were aimed at describing the main goals and intentions of the programme, at investigating the programme's inputs and processes and at identifying any external or internal issues that might have had an impact on the programme's implementation. The data obtained in these interviews were compared to data obtained through group

discussions with the NHP staff in order to examine different perspectives on the programme development and implementation so that programme strengths and weaknesses may be identified.

The first stage in the analysis of interviews was the transcriptions of the audiotape. Following the transcription phase, the interpretation process aimed at developing the theory but also represented the basis for the decision about which additional data should be collected. In analysing the interview data, this study used theoretical coding. The process of interpretation began with open coding (for details on open coding refer to section 7.1 in Chapter 7 for students' interviews and section 8.1 in Chapter 8 for interviews with the NHP's heads) which Strauss and Corbin (1990: 57) understood as 'representing the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data'. Open coding expressed data and phenomena in the form of concepts or codes. The next step in this procedure was to categorise these codes by grouping them around phenomena discovered in the data which were particularly relevant to the research question. The resulting categories were again linked to codes but these codes were now more abstract than those used in the first step (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pg 57). The third step was axial coding which refined and differentiated the categories resulting from open coding. Categories were selected according to their relevance to research questions. Relations between categories were then established, its causes and consequences, its context and the strategies of those who were involved. The fourth step was selective coding which allows axial coding at a higher level of abstraction. The analysis and the development of the theory aimed at discovering patterns in the data as well as the conditions under which these applied. The main advantage of theoretical coding is that its procedure is flexible enough that it allows the researcher to re-enter the same source texts and the same codes from open coding with a different research question and enables developing and formulating a grounded theory of a different issue.

### 3.5 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

#### *Descriptive phase*

The first phase of research was descriptive and its objective was to examine and describe the external and internal context of the NHP, to identify the target participants in the programme and assess their needs and to identify opportunities for addressing those needs. Analysis of course and teaching materials, teacher observation reports - internal and external, mentoring system and pastoral care, assessment of external agencies' work were addressed in group discussions. Local Authority and inspection reports, programme records and documentation were also analysed. In the next step of document analysis, students' files and progress reviews were analysed in order to compare school reports on admission to college, diagnostic tests and the end of year exam results. This provided information on students' progression in terms of their behaviour, attainment and attendance while on the programme.

#### *Exploratory phase*

The second stage of research was exploratory and it consisted of two parts. The first part focused on the assessment of programme inputs in terms of finance, staffing and resources. This was achieved through the examination of the NHP documents, group discussions with staff and semi-structured interviews with the NHP management. This phase aimed to examine how the programme was implemented and to identify defects in the procedural design or in the implementation of the programme, and recording and judging procedural events and activities with the view to improving the NHP processes.

The second part identified commonalities and differences of the NHP with national and international studies of AEPs. It served as a form of meta-analysis (Gerring, 2007) which is used to integrate results to allow for generalisation of findings in these studies. This provided a valuable insight on the implementation of different research strategies in similar contexts. The examination of a methodological approach, the

research methodology employed in these studies and their findings could determine their reliability and effectiveness. This is intended to provide more concrete evidence of the feasibility of different approaches when applied in practice.

### *Explanatory phase*

The explanatory phase measured programme outcomes – students’ retention, attendance, academic achievement and progression to further education, training and employment. The college database was used to assess programme outcomes in terms of retention, attendance and academic achievement, and student questionnaires were used to ‘track’ student progression after the completion of the NHP.

Data collected using quantitative methods are often believed to provide more objective and accurate information because they are collected by employment of standardised methods and can be easily replicated and checked. In line with this argument, this phase used quantitative measures of different outcomes (students’ attendance; retention, success and achievement rates; students’ progression) to judge the extrinsic value of the NHP and its utility in meeting students’ needs.

A historical approach to the data analysis was adopted in order to compare these outcomes year on year, over the period of seven academic years. The aim of this stage of evaluation was to provide part of the answer to the question ‘how effective is the programme in addressing students’ needs and its impact on students’ attendance, achievement, retention and progression rates?’

The first stage of analysis compared success, retention and achievement rates in GCSE English, Mathematics and ICT (subjects prescribed by the National Curriculum as compulsory) over the period of seven years, to national averages for these subjects

in order to check whether these rates were in line with national averages. National averages served as explicit standards against which the overall success of the programme outcomes was judged by the programme management and external agencies.

In the second stage of analysis, data on success, retention and achievement rates in each subject, were compared to students' attendance in these subjects for each academic year to check if there was an impact of students' overall attendance on achievement and success rates in these subjects. It was expected that attendance could have a positive impact on retention, success and achievement rates.

The number of students was added for each year to check whether the cohort size in each academic year had an impact on retention, achievement and success rates. It was expected that higher student numbers might have had a negative impact on retention, success and achievement rates.

This phase of the research also aimed to establish causes and effects by comparing the NHP's outcomes year on year and by linking these outcomes to objectives in the descriptive and exploratory phases with a view to improving the programme.

Table 3.6 outlines the objective for each of these phases, relates them to research questions and identifies research methods used to answer these questions.

Research phases	Descriptive phase	Exploratory phase 1	Exploratory phase 2	Explanatory phase
Objective	To define the NHP context, to identify its target population and assess their needs, to identify opportunities for addressing those needs, to diagnose problems underlying the needs	Literature review on other alternative programmes and their findings  Literature review on 14-19 education system in England	To identify and assess NHP capabilities in terms of staffing and resources  To identify or predict defects in the procedural design or its implementation  To record and assess procedural activities	To collect data on NHP's outcomes and to relate it to objectives in descriptive and exploratory 2 phases
Research questions	How can Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory examine which factors influence students' disengagement with education in KS4?	What impact has the development of 14-19 educational system in England had on disaffected students?	What are the views of the students on how effective the NHP is in engaging disaffected students?  What are the views of the students and NHP staff on its overall strengths and weaknesses?	What is the NHP's impact on students' attendance, retention, achievement and progression post-16?
Method used to answer research questions	Document reviews, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, surveys	Literature research on AEPs, group discussions	Questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, document reviews, group discussions	College database analysis, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, group discussions

Table 3.6 - Research phases and methods used within them in relation to research questions

### 3.5 ETHICAL ISSUES AND RESEARCHER'S ROLE

Cohen and Manion (1994) pointed out that 'Much social research necessitates obtaining consent and co-operation from subjects who are to assist in investigations' (pg 349). The term 'Informed consent' is used by many researchers (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Patton, 1990; Robson, 1997) to indicate the need to be 'open' with the participants and that the participants can choose whether to be involved or not.

Stake (1995) argued that the case study researcher 'has an obligation to think through the ethics of the situation and to take the necessary steps prior to requesting access and permission' (pg 58). The vulnerable nature of the student participants in this study is a key issue and their feelings must be acknowledged. Stake further suggests that the researcher should present participants with a rationale for the study and indicate how their participation will support the study. Anderson and Arsenault (1998: 10) asserted that the position, which the researcher adopts, must be pointed out to all participants and 'Investigations must be honest and open'. To achieve this openness and integrity in communications with all the participants in this study, I adopted Anderson and Arsenault's suggestions about maintaining anonymity and establishing an ethical stance which involves six elements:

- An explanation of the purpose of the research and procedures that will be used;
- A description of any reasonably foreseeable risks and discomforts to the subjects;
- A description of any benefits that may reasonably be expected, including incentives to participate;
- An offer to answer any questions concerning the procedures;
- A statement that participation is voluntary and that the subject is free to withdraw from the study at any time' (Anderson and Arsenault, pg 18-19).

Confidentiality and anonymity involve a clear understanding between the researcher and the participants concerning how the data will be used and 'assumes that the reader

of the research will not be able to deduce the identity of the individual' (Anderson and Arsenault, pg 20).

In order to preserve participants' anonymity I used fictional names for the borough, the programme and all research participants throughout the study.

Due to the vulnerability of the students who are the subject of this study, which can raise unforeseen ethical issues, it was essential that I was aware of a need to constantly consider and review these issues and address them as they occurred, throughout the research process.

As an internal researcher, a teacher employed on the NHP at the time the study was undertaken, I had an obvious interest in the NHP. Consequently, this raised different issues about the possibility of biasing data or its interpretation by presenting the programme as effective or not effective. Although my beliefs and values influenced my methodological approach and interpretations, I needed to ensure that biases for or against the programme were minimised. This was achieved through investigator's triangulation which involved various participants during different stages of the research process, and data analysis and interpretation. Methodological and data sources triangulation (Denzin, 1989) were also employed.

An open communication amongst all the participants was adopted in order to ensure credibility and validity of the findings and avoid any conflict of interests or power relationships. Thus, all the research materials were available to the participants for examination. This strategy should have ensured that any biases which could potentially be associated with my role on the programme were avoided.

Following the data collection on the programme outcomes in the exploratory and explanatory phases, the programme staff were presented with the results which were then discussed in order to agree on any additional variables which could have an impact on these rates. The staff were also consulted on the presentation of the data to ensure that they were able to understand the meaning of these findings and their usefulness and application in practice.



### 3.7 REPORTING OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The report should provide the reader with the ‘natural history of the inquiry’ (Erickson, 1986 cited in Robson, 2002: 508), so that s/he can identify what was done, by whom and how. Thus the report should provide a detailed account of the research design and methods used in collecting data to allow the reader to gain an insight into how the key concepts of the study have emerged and developed over time and how these concepts were selected.

When writing a report on a case study, it is important to consider the intended audience. The appropriate style of the report will depend on the nature and purpose of the enquiry. This study seeks to inform several different audiences - stakeholders in the programme, decision makers and the educational community more broadly. Thus different styles of report should be adopted to suit all of them. Robson (2002: 512-513) suggests six forms of organising the writing-up of a case study. This study will use the *suspense structure* to report evaluation findings to decision makers. Here the researcher presents main findings in the executive summary which is the opening part of the report, this is followed by providing evidence, analysis, explanations, justifications and argument and finally conclusion and recommendation. The *narrative report* will be used to inform the programme stakeholders and it provides a prose account of the study supported with relevant figures, tables, emergent issues, analysis and conclusion. The report intended for the educational community will take the form of a *comparative structure* which requires that the same case be examined through two or more lenses (explanatory, descriptive, theoretical) in order either ‘to provide a rich, all-round account of the case, or to enable the reader to have sufficient information from which to judge which of the explanations, descriptions or theories best fit the data’ (Robson, 2002: 512-513).

#### Summary

In this chapter, I attempted to describe the theoretical perspective which underpins my study. I explained how Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory was used to examine the causes of students’ disaffection with education at KS4 and how different eco-systems were examined. Next, I discussed the research design and methods which are

employed to conduct my study. Finally, I addressed the ethical issues which needed to be taken into consideration throughout conducting the research, and my own role as an internal researcher.

In the next chapter, I report how the research was undertaken and provide detailed description of data collection in each phase of research process. I explain how the theory emerged from the data and how the research questions were answered.

## **CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS**

### **4.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

This chapter through sections 4.1 – 4.5 outlines the findings from the documentary analysis and data on student outcomes which have been described in the previous chapter. Discussions at the end of each section involved analysis of data findings in relation to research questions posed by the study. I also discuss how grounded theory developed through collection and analysis of data findings.

The analysis of documentary evidence was identified by the New Horizons Programme (NHP) staff in group discussion 1 as an initial step in the investigation of the NHP. In order to be able to examine the NHP in its natural context and how it run on daily basis, it was necessary to describe what happened on the programme, how it was organized and how its events were recorded. Thus, through the examination of the NHP's documents and records, this descriptive phase of evaluation aimed to assess the NHP's processes, its external and internal context, to identify its target participants and assess their needs and to identify opportunities for addressing those needs. The ultimate aim of this phase of investigation was to detect potential problems and judge whether proposed aims and objectives in the 'collaboration agreement' (for detailed description of this agreement see section 4.2.1 below), which set the requirements for the implementation of the NHP, were implemented in the NHP processes and whether they addressed the identified needs of students. This phase of evaluation was designed with the aim of improving the NHP by evaluating and critiquing its strengths and weaknesses. It also provided information for the approaching exploratory phase of evaluation in group discussion 2.

The NHP was set up by the Local Authority (LA) in collaboration with a local further education (FE) college to cater for students who were excluded or at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. The literature review in Chapter 2 identified FE colleges as having an important role in providing alternative education for young people who were still in compulsory education but were disengaged with the curriculum offered in mainstream schools. However, the quality of educational provision outside of mainstream schools was questioned by OfSTED (1995) and research showed that the

attainment of these students was lower than of their peers who were educated in mainstream schools. These students were also more likely to drop out from education post compulsory age and end up not being in education, training or employment (NEET). The London Borough of East End was identified as having a large number of young people who were NEET and this number has been unchanged in the last decade. Under the current legislation, LAs retain full responsibility for overseeing the standards and performance as well as financial arrangements of their maintained schools (DfE, 2013). Thus, it was also necessary to examine the role of the local LA in implementation of the NHP as an alternative educational provider for students of compulsory school age. In addition, the quality assurance procedures that were put in place for the NHP also needed to be investigated.

In relation to the theoretical framework adopted in this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (BEST) identified that the immediate educational setting as micro-system played an important role in the development of young people. The examination of documentary evidence provided the description of this educational setting and these findings were later used to triangulate with the findings in other research methods employed in this study. Finally, the findings from documentary evidence provided an answer to research question 1: 'How effective is the NHP in engaging students who are disaffected with education?'

## **4.2 SOURCES OF DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

### **4.2.1. Collaboration Agreement**

The Collaboration Agreement (CA) is an agreement between the college and local schools although it is devised in agreement between the Head of School on the NHP and the Local Authority's (LA) Quality Assurance Manager (QAM).

In this agreement, the NHP is described as a service provider, the local schools as service users and the LA as a collaborative partner. It was drafted by the LA's QAM. The draft of the CA was then discussed with the Head of NHP and appropriate targets were agreed. Finally, the agreement was approved by the Director of Faculty (the

Head of NHP's line manager and member of the Senior Management Team-SMT in college). The agreement was signed by the parties entering the agreement (the head of NHP, heads of school or tuition centre and the LA).

This is an important record since it sets programme's aims and objectives and defines programme's outcomes. These aims, objectives and targets were examined and coded for their relevance to the research questions posed by this study and to reflect the theoretical framework.

### Codes and themes

The aims, objectives and targets were initially coded under 25 headings:

- alternative curriculum
- individual learning plan
- diagnostic tests and attainment
- behaviour management strategies
- vocational tasters
- attendance and punctuality
- co-ordinated External agencies support
- reduction in criminal and anti-social behaviour
- recreational activities-enrichment-extracurricular
- special educational needs
- co-operation with families/carers
- raise self-esteem and take responsibility for own actions
- setting academic and behavioural SMART targets
- progression in education, employment or training post-16
- evaluation of programme and course reviews
- staff CRB checks
- child protection
- health and safety
- withdrawals and exclusions
- complaints procedure
- code of conduct

- parental consent
- student survey
- meetings with LA and schools
- staff training and development

These codes were then grouped into themes according to how they related to the research questions posed by this study and the theoretical approach that guided the study. Figure 4.1 shows the CA themes that emerged from the codes.

Table 4.1 Codes and themes from the CA

Collaboration Agreement codes	Collaboration Agreement themes
Alternative curriculum	Curriculum
Vocational tasters	Curriculum
Recreational activities-enrichment-extracurricular	Curriculum
Individual learning plan	Pastoral care
Attendance and punctuality	Pastoral care
Special Educational needs	Pastoral care
Raise self-esteem, take responsibility for own actions	Pastoral care
Reduction in criminal and anti-social behaviour	Collaboration
Co-operation with families/carers	Collaboration
Meetings with LA and schools	Collaboration
Co-ordinated External agencies support	Collaboration
Diagnostic tests and attainment	Targets
Setting academic and behavioural SMART targets	Targets
Progression in E, E or T post-16	Targets
Behaviour management strategies	Policies and Procedures
Child protection	Policies and Procedures
Health and safety	Policies and Procedures
Withdrawals and exclusions	Policies and Procedures
Complaints procedure	Policies and Procedures
Code of conduct	Policies and Procedures
Student survey	Student voice
Parental consent	Parental voice
Lesson observation, staff training and development	Quality assurance
Evaluation of programme and course reviews	Quality assurance
Staff CRB checks	Quality assurance

The themes identified from aims, objectives and targets in the CA provided a contextual framework for the implementation of the NHP. They described the

important features and processes that needed to be implemented in the development of the NHP and the desired outcomes for students.

The themes that were identified in the CA were then examined in other documents and records that were produced and used in the NHP in order to assess its strengths and weaknesses in terms of the NHP implementation. These themes were presented through the description of NHP's processes.

Table 4.2 indicates the contents analysis of each of these documents and records. Table 4.3 provides the context for the use and production of documentary evidence that was implemented in the NHP. Table 4.4 identifies records and documents in which the themes that emerged from the CA reoccurred.

Table 4.2 – Contents analysis in NHP documentary evidence

Documentary evidence	ILPs/student file	Student progress reviews	Referral forms	Student Interview records	Course Programme Reviews –
Contents/ themes	School records on attendance, punctuality, attainment, SEN/SEBD including the Statement of SEN if applicable	Student Attendance	Student Attendance	Student Attendance	Overall College Self Assessment, Judgements
	Medical records	Student punctuality	Student punctuality	Student punctuality	Sector Subject Area Self Assessment Grades
	Correspondence with external agencies (e.g. CAHMS, EP, Careers Services, YOS, Social Services) if applicable	Attitude towards work	Student attainment at KS3 in English, Maths and Science	Experience of education in school	Outcomes for learners
	Student timetable	Short term targets	SEN requirement	Career aspirations	Quality of provision – strengths and weaknesses, improvements
	Attendance and punctuality records	Any behavioural issues	Involvement of other agencies	Personal strengths and weaknesses including academic and SEBD, students' voice	Lesson Observation Grades
	Career interviews records	Student's comment on the above - students' voice	Reasons for referral	Involvement of other agencies	Leadership and management
	Student Progress Reviews Diagnostic assessments in English and maths			Criminal record – meetings with YOS college requirement for risk assessment	
	Disciplinary records if applicable				
	Record of communication with parents				



Table 4.3 - Context analysis typology – production of documentary evidence and their use

Documentary evidence/typology	ILPs	Student progress reviews	Referral forms	Student Interview records	Course reviews
Who designed them?	NHP management and staff	QAM and NHP management	NHP management	NHP management and staff	SMT
Why were they made?	To collect information on students' background and progression	To record students' academic and behavioural progress	To record information on students' backgrounds including reasons for referral and academic achievement in school	To assess students' suitability for the NHP	To assure the NHP quality and assess its strengths and weaknesses with the view to improving the NHP
How were they recorded?	Collating information in students' files	Using designated form	Using designated form	Using designated form	Using designated form
Who recorded them?	NHP Staff	Form tutors and teaching staff for individual subjects	Referral agencies	NHP management and staff who conducted selection interviews	NHP management and staff
Who checked them?	NHP management and staff	NHP management and staff	NHP management and staff	NHP management and staff	SMT
Were they edited?	No	No	No	No	No
Who has access to them?	NHP management and staff	NHP management and staff, individual students and their parents	NHP management and staff	NHP management and staff	SMT, NHP management and staff
When and how often were they produced?	Termly but information added as/when issues arised	Termly	Upon students' referral in selection procedure	During selection interviews	At the end of each academic year

Table 4.4 – Comparison of themes in the CA and NHP documentary evidence

CA themes	Collaboration Agreement codes	The NHP documentary evidence for CA themes
Curriculum	Alternative curriculum	Programme file, Course Review Forms
	Vocational tasters	Programme file, Course Review Forms
	Recreational activities-enrichment-extracurricular	Programme file, Course Review Forms
Pastoral care	Individual learning plan	Student individual file
	Attendance and punctuality	Referral forms, Student interview records, Student Progress Reviews, Course Reviews, Minutes of staff meetings
	Special Educational needs	Referral forms, Student interview records, Student Progress Reviews, Course Reviews, Minutes of staff meetings
	Raise self-esteem, take responsibility for own actions	Student individual files
Collaboration	Reduction in criminal and anti-social behaviour	Programme file, Student individual files, Minutes of staff meetings
	Co-operation with families/carers	Student individual files
	Meetings with LA and schools	Programme file
	Co-ordinated External agencies support	Programme file, Student individual files
Targets	Diagnostic tests and attainment	Student individual files
	Setting academic and behavioural SMART targets	Student individual files, Student Progress Reviews
	Progression in E, E or T post-16	Programme file, Student individual files
Policies and Procedures	Behaviour management strategies	Programme file, Student individual files
	Child protection	Programme file, Student individual files, Minutes of staff meetings
	Health and safety	Programme file, Student individual files, Minutes of staff meetings
	Withdrawals and exclusions	Programme file, Minutes of staff meetings
	Complaints procedure	Programme file, Student individual files
	Code of conduct	Programme file, Student individual files
Student voice	Student survey	Programme file, Course Review Forms

#### **4.2.2. THE EXAMINATION OF DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE THROUGH THE DESCRIPTION OF NHP'S PROCESSES**

##### *SELECTING STUDENTS AND ASSESSING THEIR NEEDS*

'Referral forms' were used for selecting students for the NHP and for identifying their individual learning and behavioural needs. Upon referral to the NHP, referral forms (see Appendix 5) were completed by referral agencies (local schools, Pupil Referral Unit - PRU or sometimes by Connexions careers officers). They provided a range of individual student data (see Table 4.2 above).

Following the referral, students were invited to attend an interview with their parents/carers (this allowed the interviewers to examine parental attitude to their child's education and their support in student's decision to attend the NHP). The interviews were conducted by a Head of School (HOS) or Curriculum Team Leader (CTL) and another member of teaching staff, either teacher or Learning Support Assistant (LSA). During the interviews, both interviewers made notes on the 'Student Interview Checklist' while addressing the following questions: students' schooling life and their experiences in mainstream education, absence from mainstream education, reasons for referral/exclusion, future carrier aspirations, educational and general interests, attendance and punctuality in school/PRU, difficulties in learning, behaviour etc, criminal involvement, students' views of their own strengths and weaknesses; and the involvement of other external agencies such as YOS, Social Services, Educational Psychology Service.

The interview notes were then examined and compared by interviewers at the end of the interview in order to cross-check them and to make a decision on acceptance of the student and conditions of their acceptance (these conditions could have been a request for more information on the student from school or other external agency in relation to their attendance, behaviour, SEN; attendance targets set for individual students or agreement to provide and agree to specific support such as: drugs counselling, mental health, attendance).

The information contained in referral and interview forms was then stored in individual student files for later use and setting the initial Individual Learning Targets which included both academic and behavioural targets.

Following the successful interview and acceptance on the NHP, students and their parents/carers were asked to read and sign a learning agreement, consent forms, behaviour policy, and the disciplinary procedures. This was to ensure that both students and their parents/carers understood and agreed with the terms and conditions set out in these documents/records.

Initially, all students were accepted on a six-week trial basis to ensure that schools or referral agencies took students back within this period, should they, their parents/carers or the NHP staff recognised that the NHP did not fulfil the needs of the individual student. This procedure was adopted to ensure that all students had an adequate educational placement and it was proving to be more beneficial than exclusion for students, whose needs required a different type of provision with even smaller classes, more intensive support in literacy and numeracy or other learning needs. The reasons for a trial period were also explained to students and their parents/carers in the course of the interview.

Once students had enrolled on the NHP, they completed diagnostic assessments in English, Mathematics and ICT. These tests had been designed by the College curriculum management and adapted by the teaching staff on the NHP to indicate the levels on which individual students were working in relation to the National Curriculum for English and Mathematics. Diagnostic results were used in devising individual learning targets for each student, lesson planning and in assessing individual students' needs in order to accommodate these needs and allow students' academic progress and prepare them for external and internal examinations which took place in May/June in each academic year. All the information was then stored in students' individual files.

Later in this study, the results from diagnostic assessments were used as baselines for a measurement of change in students' progress and attainment.

## *ADDRESSING AND RECORDING STUDENTS' NEEDS*

Throughout the academic year, termly reviews of student progress in English, Mathematics, ICT and BTEC subjects were recorded in Student Progress Reviews by the subject teachers. These reviews provided information on students' attendance, punctuality, attitude towards work set in class, participation in class activities, behaviour and any disciplinary issues, and further targets were then set as necessary in relation to these for each of the above mentioned subjects. These reviews were discussed with students to elicit their views on their progress and the students also participated in setting their own targets. The reviews were also sent to parents/carers to inform them of their child's progress.

The information described above allowed the NHP staff to identify the areas for improvement and students' learning needs with the aim of preparing students for internal and external examinations and beyond that to ensure their successful progression to their post-16 phase. The study programme on the NHP was intensive and it was designed to prepare students for exams in one academic year compared to school which normally allows two years of preparation for GCSE exams. Thus, close monitoring of students' performance in each subject and setting appropriate targets was necessary. In addition to this academic progress, behaviour targets were also set since they were as important due to the nature of cohort and their needs.

All of the above information was collated throughout May and June for the next academic year's cohort. In July, the staff meeting was held in which the planning for the next academic year took place. In this meeting, all the information from referral forms, interviews, diagnostic testing and any additional information that was requested for students from referral agencies, were compiled and students were allocated to groups according to their choice of vocational pathways (BTEC Qualifications in Art and Design, Business, Retail and Administration or Vocational Studies). Students might also have been allocated to different tutorial groups according to their ability and behavioural issues identified in referral forms, Interview notes and Diagnostics if staff members deemed this necessary. The tutor (a member of teaching staff) and mentor (a member of learning support staff) for each group was then allocated. Teaching and support staff had an opportunity to express their

preference here and generally each year different members of staff worked together as tutor and mentor. Tutors and mentors worked closely with parents/carers and communicated with them in relation to students' academic and behaviour progress and student progress reviews were sent to them termly.

The analyses of referral forms, interview notes and diagnostic test results were used in building student profiles and addressing their individual needs in the students' individual case studies outlined later in the thesis.

### *MEASURING OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS*

College database analysis was conducted by using quantitative measurement of the NHP outcomes in relation to students' attendance, retention, achievement and success rates.

The first stage of analysis compared success, retention and achievement rates in GCSE English, Mathematics and ICT (subjects prescribed by the National Curriculum as compulsory) over the period of seven years, to national averages for these subjects in order to check whether these rates were in line with national averages. National averages served as explicit standards against which the overall success of the NHP's outcomes was judged.

Table 4.5 presents data on success, retention, achievement and attendance in all subjects delivered on the programme for the period of seven academic years, as well as national averages for success, retention and achievement rates in these subjects. The number of students in each academic year is also shown for the same period of time.

The data was collected from the college database and results on achievement cross-checked with exam board documentation.

*Explanation of definitions used in Table 4.5*

Number of starters indicates total number of students enrolled on each course.

Retention rate indicates the percentage of students who have actually completed the course compared to the number of students who were enrolled on the course.

Achievement rate shows the percentage of students who passed their exams out of those who completed the course.

Success rate shows the percentage of students who passed their exams out of the total number of students who were actually enrolled on the course.

National averages for GCSE exams have been taken from the Department for Education and Skills website for academic years 2004-2008 and the Department for Education website for academic years 2009 and 2010.

Table 4.5 Data on success, retention, achievement and attendance

Qualifications	Definition	Year 04/05	Year 05/06	Year 06/07	Year 07/08	Year 08/09	Year 09/10	Year 10/11	National Averages
GCSE English	No of starters	20	37	54	61	49	34	25	
	success rates	100%	81%	70%	74%	78%			73%
	retention rates	100%	95%	87%	84%	86%			89%
	achievement rates	100%	86%	81%	88%	90%			82%
	Attendance		77%	72%	76%	85%			
GCSE Mathematics	No of starters	26	37	43	61	43			
	success rates	96%	76%	63%	67%	79%			76%
	retention rates	100%	95%	87%	84%	84%			91%
	achievement rates	96%	80%	72%	80%	94%			84%
	Attendance		80%	75%	77%	85%			
GCSE ICT	No of starters		37	54	61	49			
	success rates		76%	44%	66%	78%			68%
	retention rates		95%	87%	70%	86%			89%
	achievement rates		80%	51%	93%	90%			53%
	Attendance		77%	75%	78%	85%			
BTEC Introductory Certificate in Art, Design and Media	No of starters				15	13	11		
	success rates				60%	85%	82%		73%
	retention rates				73%	92%	82%		89%
	achievement rates				82%	92%	100%		82%
	Attendance				66%	78%	84%		
BTEC Introductory Certificate in Business, Administration and Retail	No of starters			15	15	26	12		
	success rates			80	73	87%	64%		64%
	retention rates			93%	73%	91%	93%		86%
	achievement rates			86%	100%	95%	69%		74%
	Attendance			79%	69%	89%	69%		
BTEC Introductory Certificate in Vocational Studies	No of starters				30	10	11	25	
	success rates				67%	80%	46%	84%	<b>32%</b>
	retention rates				87%	80%	64%	92%	<b>65%</b>
	achievement rates				77%	100%	71%	91%	<b>45%</b>
	Attendance				72%	93%	69%	85%	
Edexcel Entry Level Literacy/ Functional Skills in English (2010/11)	No of starters	30		43		15	34	25	
	success rates	37%		9%		100%	79%	92%	<b>58%</b>
	retention rates	53%		100%		100%	88%	92%	<b>88%</b>
	achievement rates	69%		9%		100%	90%	100%	<b>65%</b>
Edexcel Entry Level Numeracy/ Functional Skills in Mathematics (2010/11)	No of starters	50		43		10	34	25	
	success rates	54%		70%		100%	79%	92%	<b>69%</b>
	retention rates	67%		100%		100%	88%	92%	<b>91%</b>
	achievement rates	80%		70%		100%	90%	100%	<b>75%</b>
Entry Level IT	No of starters	50			6				
	success rates	42%			83%				58%
	retention rates	68%			100%				84%
	achievement rates	62%			83%				69%



## DATA ANALYSIS FOR GCSE ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND ICT

Formal statistical analysis was not undertaken in relation to the presented data. Instead the results across seven academic years were first compared to national averages to indicate how effective the NHP was in enhancing students' retention and achievement. The number of students entering and remaining on the programme were then examined for each academic year to assess whether differences in group size might have had an impact on students' retention and achievement. Based on these data examinations and comparisons, broad conclusions were then drawn to identify different factors that impacted on students' retention and achievement.

### *GCSE English results*

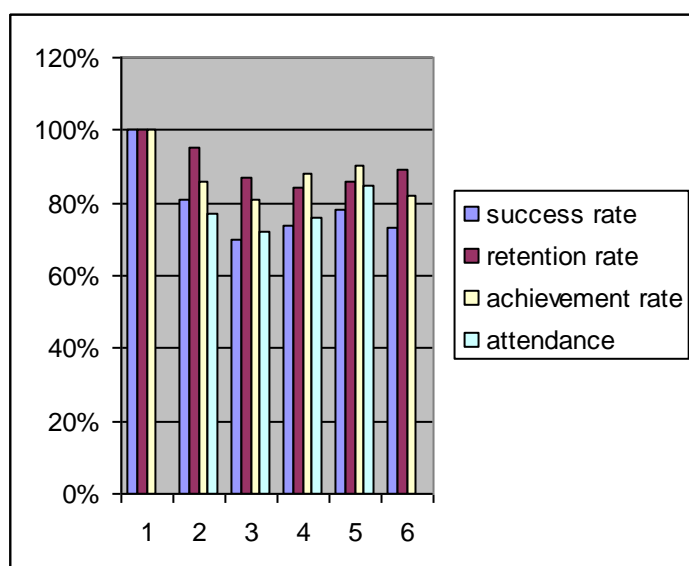


Figure 4.6 GCSE English results

Results for GCSE English are presented in Figures 4.6-4.8. Numbers 1-5 on the 'x-axis' represent academic years 2004/5 to 2008/9, whereas number 6 represents national averages for success, retention and achievement rates for GCSE English.

The results in academic year 2004/5 (number 1 on the 'x-axis') showed 100 per cent for success, retention and achievement rates and significantly higher than national averages.

In academic years 2005/6 to 2008/9 (number 2-5 on the 'x-axis'), success rates were slightly higher or in line with national averages except in academic year 2006/7 (number 3 on the 'x-axis') when success rate was lower than national average by 3 per cent.

Retention rates were lower than national averages except for the academic year 2005/6 (number 2 on the 'x-axis') when it was 6 per cent higher than national averages.

Achievement rates were higher than national averages in all academic years except in 2006/7 (number 3 on the 'x-axis') when it was lower by merely 1 per cent.

Poor retention rates compared to national averages resulted in lower success rates.

The comparison of students' attendance, achievement and success rates in GCSE English showed that when the attendance figures were higher, the achievement and success rates were also high (see Figure 4.7).

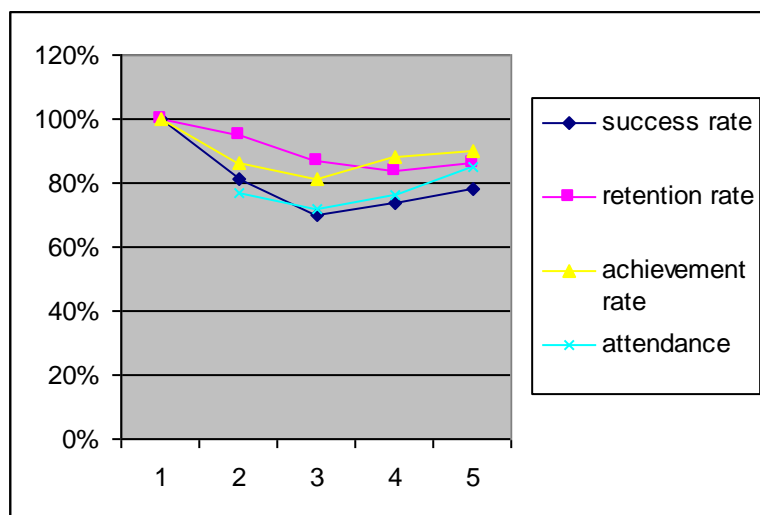


Figure 4.7 Comparison of attendance, retention, achievement and success rates

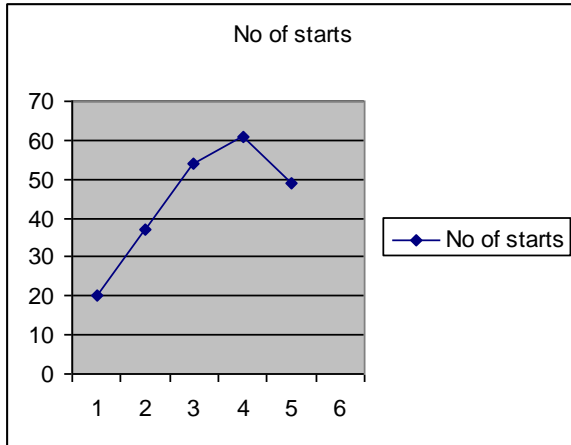


Figure 4.8 Number of starters

Since the success, retention and achievement rates were exceptionally high in 2004/5 when student numbers were lower than in any subsequent year, student numbers were compared in each year with achievement, retention and success rates to check whether they impacted on retention and achievement.

The results indicated that student numbers had a negative impact on retention and achievement rates in all years except in 2007/8 (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8).

## GCSE Mathematics results

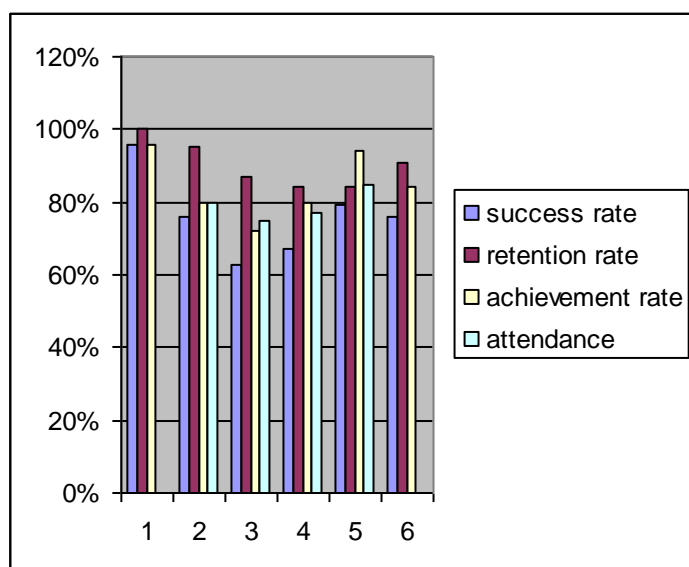


Figure 4.9 GCSE Mathematics results

GCSE Mathematics results are presented in Figures 4.9-4.11. Numbers 1-5 on the 'x-axis' represent academic years 2004/5 to 2008/9, whereas number 6 represents national averages for success, retention and achievement rates for GCSE Mathematics.

In the academic year 2004/5 (number 1 on the 'x-axis'), success, retention and achievement rates were significantly higher than national averages in GCSE Mathematics.

In the following four years (numbers 2-5 on the 'x-axis'), the success rates were lower than national averages in 2006/7 and 2007/8 (number 3 and 4 on the 'x-axis'), in line with national averages in 2005/6 (number 2 on the 'x-axis') and higher than national averages in 2008/9 (number 5 on the 'x-axis').

Retention rates were lower than national averages except in 2005/6 (number 2 on the 'x-axis') when it was higher than national average.

Achievement rates were lower than national averages in all academic years except in 2008/9 (number 5 on the 'x-axis') when it was higher than national average.

In academic years 2004/5, 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8 (number 1 to 4 on the 'x-axis'), the results showed that when student numbers were lower, retention rates were higher except in 2008/9 (number 5 on the 'x-axis') when both student numbers and retention rates were high.

The number of students and achievement rates varied year on year. In 2004/5, 2005/6, 2006/7 and again in 2008/9 when student numbers were low, achievement rates were high whereas in 2007/8 both student numbers and achievement rates were high. This could be examined further in order to identify other factors that may have had an impact on the findings, such as students' diagnostic results upon enrolment which would indicate students' academic ability. However, this was not undertaken as part of this study.

Accordingly, success rates also varied across the same academic years.

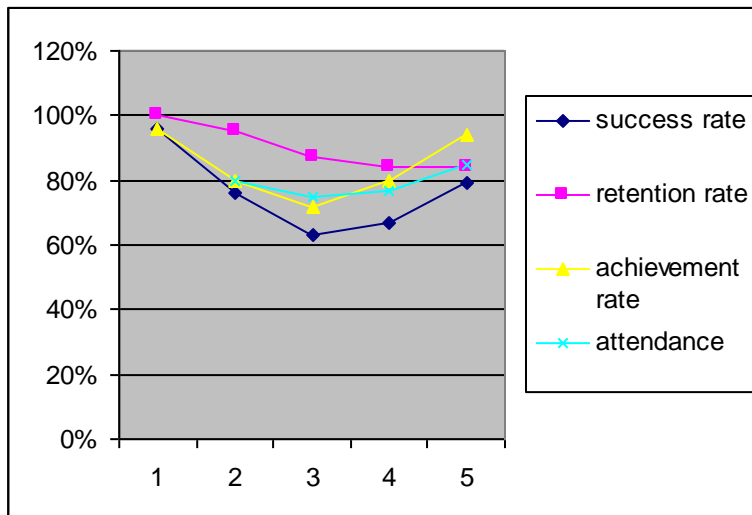


Figure 4.10 Comparison of attendance, retention, achievement and success rates

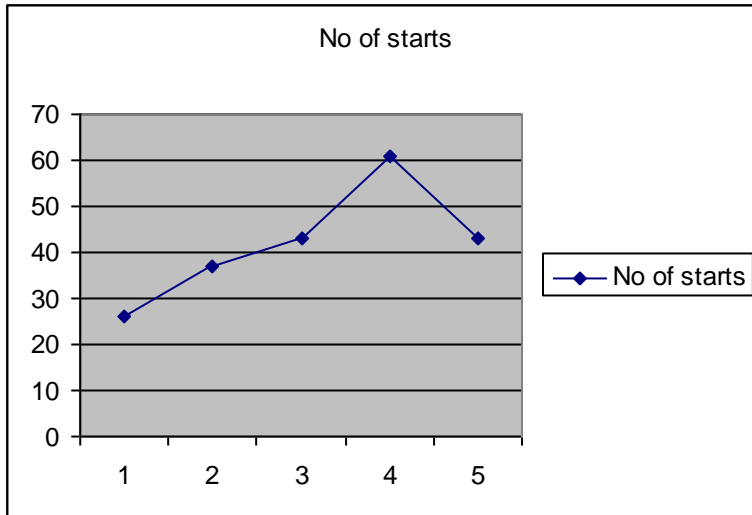


Figure 4.11 Number of starters

The results showed that when attendance was higher, achievement rates were also high in all years. Accordingly, higher attendance resulted in higher success rates in all academic years (see Figures 4.10 and 4.11).

### *GCSE ICT Results*

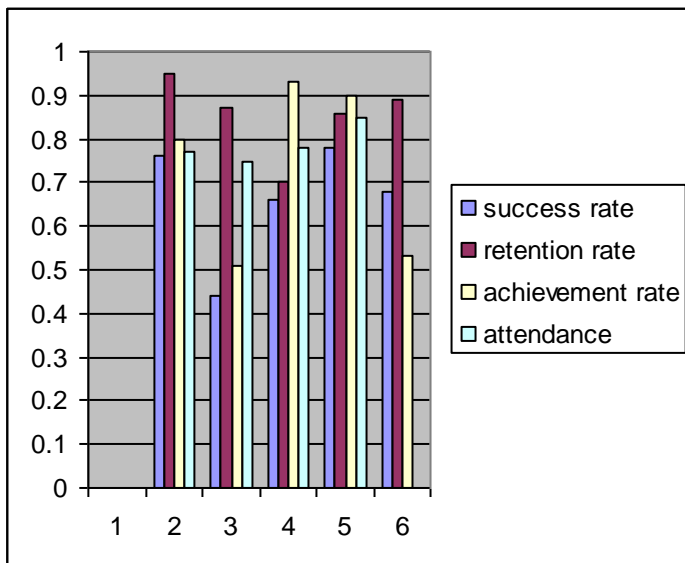


Figure 4.12 GCSE ICT results

Results for GCSE ICT are presented in Figures 4.12-4.14. Numbers 1-5 on the 'x-axis' represent academic years 2004/5 to 2008/9, whereas number 6 represents national averages for success, retention and achievement rates for GCSE ICT.

Success rates were higher than national averages in 2005/6 (number 1 on the 'x-axis') and 2008/9 (number 5 on the 'x-axis') but lower in 2006/7 and 2007/8 (number 3 and 4 on the 'x-axis').

Retention rates were lower than national averages in all academic years except in 2005/6.

Achievement rates were significantly higher than national averages in all years except in 2006/7.

The relationship between students' attendance, retention, achievement and success rates varied across different academic years (see Figure 4.13).

In 2006/7 lower student attendance resulted in lower achievement rates, in 2007/8 both rates were higher than in previous year but in 2008/9 although students' attendance was higher than previous year, the achievement rate was lower.

The students' attendance had the same impact on success rates in 2006/7 and 2008/9 but not in 2007/8 due to poorer retention rates this year compared to the other two years.

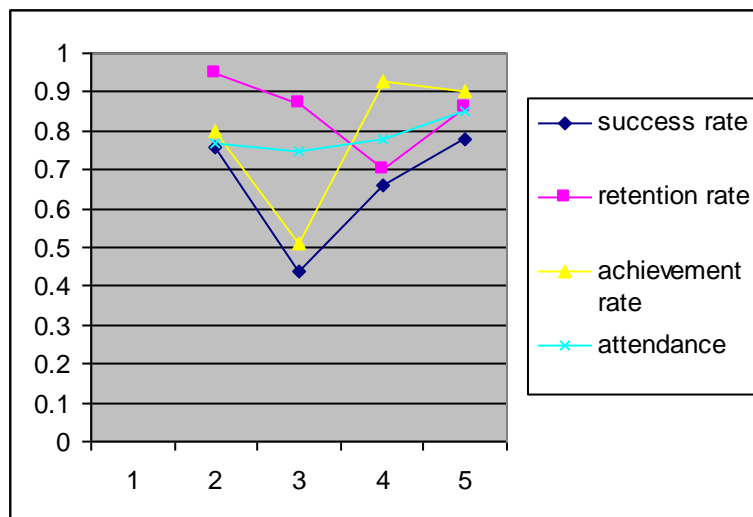


Figure 4.13 Comparison of attendance, retention, achievement and success rates

The relationship between student numbers and achievement rates varied year on year. In 2006/7 both rates were low, in 2007/8 they were high and in 2008/9 student numbers and attendance were lower than in previous year.

The fewer number of students resulted in higher success rates in all years.

The retention rates were higher when there were fewer students enrolled on the programme in all academic years (see Figures 4.13 and 4.14).

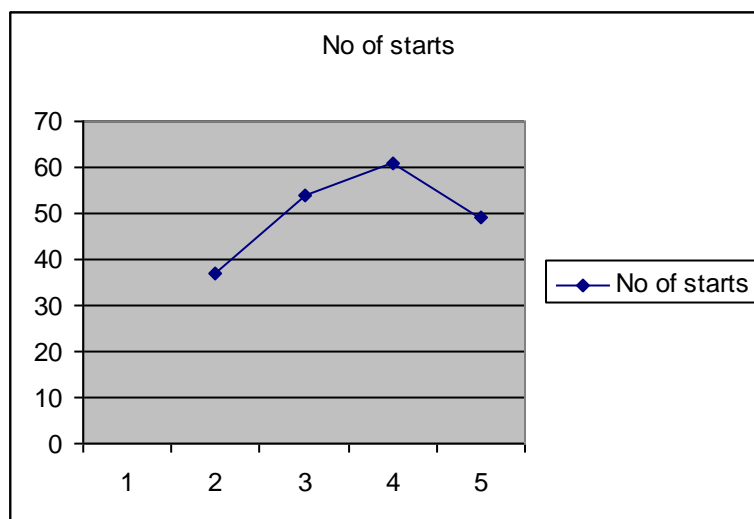


Figure 4.14 Number of starters

## DATA ANALYSIS OF OTHER QUALIFICATIONS OFFERED ON THE NHP

In academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11 GCSE qualifications were not offered in English, Mathematics and ICT on the NHP and they were replaced with Functional Skills in English and Mathematics (the ICT qualification was not offered as a 'stand alone' qualification but was embedded within the BTEC Vocational Studies qualification). For this reason, the retention, achievement and success rates in these academic years were discussed separately here. Although the students' numbers were significantly smaller in academic year 2009/10 when compared to previous academic



years, the overall retention rates were still lower than national averages. However, the overall achievement rates were high which also resulted in higher success rates when these rates were compared to national averages in these subjects. The achievement rate was significantly lower than the national average in BTEC Business although the retention rate in this subject was high. The attendance was also low in all subjects apart from in BTEC Art which also had 100 per cent achievement. This indicated that higher attendance resulted in higher achievement in this subject. Further examination was needed into reasons for low attendance and retention rates in this academic year. The low achievement rate in BTEC Business also needed to be examined further. These issues were addressed in group discussions 2 and in semi-structured interviews with the NHP's heads. In academic year 2010/11 the retention, achievement and success rates were significantly higher than national averages. The attendance was also high. The number of students enrolled in this academic year was significantly smaller than in the previous years. This suggested that when student numbers were lower, attendance, retention and achievement rates were higher. In student questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, students' views on various aspects of the NHP were explored and these findings were compared with the NHP's outcomes to identify what aspects of the NHP could have contributed to high retention, attendance and achievement other than the number of students enrolled on the NHP. This was also explored in group discussions.

It was difficult to compare these outcomes in academic years 2004-8 and 2009-2011 because the nature of assessment and curriculum delivery in FS and GCSEs is different, these qualifications are at different levels and examination is conducted in a different way.

## DISCUSSION

### *The comparison of retention, achievement and success rates*

The first stage of evaluation, which compared success, retention and achievement rates in the core subjects offered on the NHP to national averages in these subjects, showed that retention rates were lower than national averages in all subjects except in

academic years 2004/5, 2005/6 and 2010/11. Since student numbers in these academic years were lower than in other academic years, the retention rates and student numbers was then compared year on year in all subjects.

In examining retention rates, the nature of the cohort had to be taken into account. Namely, the majority of students on the NHP were referred to the NHP either because they were excluded from mainstream schools or were under threat of exclusion.

Achievement rates were overall higher than national averages in GCSE English but lower than national averages in GCSE Mathematics except in 2004/5 and 2008/9. In these academic years, students were streamed in GCSE and Entry Level classes which could explain better achievement rates. Further examination of students' diagnostic tests upon enrolment was undertaken and it indicated that students' academic ability in 2008/9 was higher than in the other academic years. This academic year also had an unusually high percentage of girls (49 per cent) compared to other academic years when boys accounted on average for 85 per cent of the total cohort. This could have had an impact on higher attendance, achievement and success rates although not retention rate. The overall achievement rates in GCSE ICT were higher than national averages.

The achievement rates were also high in academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11 which could be due to the small cohort size in these academic years. This could also be due to the curriculum offered in these academic years which was different than in previous years. The curriculum was further examined in group discussions and students' questionnaires to identify whether it had an impact on achievement.

Success rates in GCSE English were overall higher than national averages. Success rates varied across different academic years in both GCSE Mathematics and ICT but were significantly higher than national averages in 2008/9 in both subjects. Differences in students' gender and ability may have had an impact on success rates in these subjects in 2008/9, as explained above. The success rates were higher than national averages in academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11 due to higher achievement rates.

*The relationship between the number of students and retention, achievement and success rates*

Year-on-year analysis in all core subjects showed that the numbers of students enrolled on the NHP had an impact on students' retention rates. This meant that students were more likely to 'drop out' from the NHP when the overall cohort was larger and the class sizes were bigger.

The results showed that student numbers had an impact on achievement rates in GCSE English and Mathematics. The results in GCSE ICT were the same in 2006/7 but the opposite in 2007/8 and 2008/9. The results were the same when student numbers and achievement were compared in 2009/10 and 2010/11. However, fewer student numbers resulted in higher achievement in all core GCSE subjects in academic year 2007/8. Further investigation was needed to explain the variance in this academic year and in GCSE ICT. Diagnostic test results upon enrolment were compared for each academic year in order to check students' academic ability and they revealed that students' ability was higher in this academic year.

The success rates were higher when the number of students was lower in all subjects except in 2007/8 when both rates were higher. The success rates were higher when the number of students was lower in 2009/10 and 2010/11 when GCSE qualifications were replaced with the alternative qualifications. This indicated that the higher the number of students enrolled on the NHP, the lower the retention rates, which in turn lowered the success rates.

High student attendance resulted in higher achievement and success rates in GCSE English and Mathematics. This varied in GCSE ICT; attendance and achievement rate were low in 2006/7 and both were high in 2007/8 and 2008/9; attendance and success rate were low in 2006/7 and high in 2008/9, but in 2007/8 when retention rate was low attendance was higher. Although differences were shown in GCSE ICT, it could be concluded that high student attendance resulted in higher achievement and success rates. However, attendance did not seem to have an impact on retention rates.

## *Conclusion*

Although the overall retention rates for this cohort of students were lower than national averages, a significant number of students completed the NHP. Further investigation in individual case studies is needed to reveal the reasons why these students did not complete the NHP, with the aim of improving retention and success rates on the programme. These issues were also raised in group discussions with the NHP staff and interviews with heads.

Overall achievement rates were higher than national averages in GCSE English and ICT but lower in GCSE Mathematics. However, since the number of students enrolled on the NHP in each year was relatively small, low achievement rate in GCSE Mathematics was only significant in academic year 2006/7 when attendance was the lowest.

Since the national averages used in this study included all students in mainstream education in their final year of compulsory education, it would have been more accurate to compare success, retention and achievement rates with these rates in other AEPs designed for students who experience emotional, social and behavioural problems (SEBD).

This exploratory phase of evaluation of documentary evidence aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the NHP in achieving set outcomes and under which conditions the NHP achieved the highest success, retention and achievement rates compared to national averages.

In addition, students' progression in the following year, after the completion of the NHP was investigated. The data from the college database was collected but needed to be supplemented by the Connexions' database which should have supplied the information on all students' destinations upon the completion of Year 11. However, the Connexions database contained inconsistent information. Therefore, the students' destinations were examined in students' questionnaire responses in order to obtain more accurate data on students' progression. This information is presented in Chapter

6. The information obtained in the examination of students' attendance, retention and achievement in the exploratory section of this chapter and on students' progression in Chapter 6 provided an answer to the sub-question: 'How successful the NHP was in reintegrating and re-engaging students in mainstream education and enhancing their progression post-16 and therefore reducing the number of 16-19 year olds who are not in education, employment and training (NEETs) in the London Borough of East End.

### **THE DESCRIPTION OF THE NHP'S PROCEDURES IN OTHER DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

The records on the induction procedures showed how the students were introduced to the NHP and college environment which was very different to schools. This was an important part of the NHP, which took place before the official start of the full timetable for students, as it was a transition period for students. The induction took place in the first two weeks of students' attendance at college and consisted of team building exercises which comprised participation in activities at an adventure centre, the introduction to different college facilities and different departments in college as well as the introduction to the SMT who explained the benefits of studying at college, the expected behaviour and code of conduct. Security staff were also involved in explaining their role in ensuring the safety of all students and staff in college as well as the rules and discipline that operated in the college.

Quality assurance checks were conducted through course reviews. The course reviews were compiled by the members of senior management team (SMT). The information in these records was based on the information which was produced by the NHP management and staff. The main aim of course reviews was to assess the performance of the NHP in terms of students' experience and achievement, curriculum, management and resources. They included the information on the assessment of teaching and learning by internal and external observers. They indicated the main strengths and weaknesses of the NHP and the areas for improvement. They showed how quality assurance and quality improvement were conducted on the NHP and whether these complied with the requirements set in the CA. Quality assurance was also conducted annually on the NHP by the LA's QAM or equivalent and this report

was presented to the SMT in College. This theme is further examined in semi-structured interviews with the NHP's heads.

Students' surveys on the quality of service provided in college were conducted annually by the quality assurance management. However, the results of these surveys were not analysed in this study since their analysis included the responses from students from other areas within the same faculty and not only the responses from the students who attended the NHP. Thus, this would have provided an inaccurate picture of the students' experiences of college and the NHP. Instead, the students' questionnaires designed by the researcher with the NHP's staff input, were conducted with the NHP's students in order to examine their views on the overall effectiveness of the NHP and their experiences in college.

#### **4.3 THEMES EMERGING FROM THE ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

The main themes that emerged in the CA were examined through the description of NHP's processes and the examination of documents and records implemented on the NHP. The analysis of the content of these documents and records shown in Table 4.3 identified the documents and records in which themes from the CA were implemented. Table 4.4 indicated which NHP documents and records contained the themes that emerged in the CA.

The examination of the NHP's documentary evidence indicated that the themes that emerged in the CA were addressed in the implementation of the NHP.

Pastoral care was evident in the assessment of students' needs, monitoring and recording students' attendance, target setting, mentoring procedures employed and communicating with parents. This theme also emerged as an important theme in group discussions with the NHP's staff, students' questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with students and NHP's heads and is further described and discussed in relevant chapters.

The analysis of curriculum offered on the NHP, pedagogy and the approach to rules and discipline is also located in the group discussion section in the next chapter. These themes were also further explored and discussed in the students' questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with students and NHP's heads in chapters 6, 7 and 8.

The collaboration with the LA, described in this chapter through the examination of CA and documentary evidence, showed that the LA put effective procedures in place for implementation of the NHP as an AEP and that quality checks on it were conducted regularly by the LA's QAM. The collaboration with other agencies identified in the CA was examined and discussed in group discussions 2 and in the interviews with the NHP's heads.

The recording of targets is described in this chapter on the NHP's processes; through examination of college database and students' attendance, retention and achievement; and students' progression is further examined and discussed in the analysis of students' questionnaires.

Policies and procedures are identified in the programme's processes and quality checks and they are further examined and discussed in the semi-structured interviews with the NHP's heads.

#### **4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Chapter 4 examined and described documents and records that were used on the NHP. It described its processes and measured the outcomes for students. The themes that were identified in documentary evidence are then used to design the other data collection methods in this study. They indicate how Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (BEST) guided a comprehensive examination of AEPs which forms the basis of an answer to research question 3.

In his ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1977: 80) defined a micro-system as 'the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person. A setting is defined as a place with

particular physical features in which the participants engage in particular activities in particular roles'. The NHP was examined as an important micro-system that had a direct impact on the development of the young people – their progress in terms of attendance, achievement, behaviour and progression post-16. A meso-system 'comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life' (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 81). These interrelations encompassed the relationship with teachers, parents and their peers and are further examined and discussed in relevant chapters later in this thesis.

An exo-system 'is an extension of the meso-system embracing other specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there' (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 81). The LA represented an exo-system. The examination of the CA showed the LA's role and input in implementing the NHP as an AEP for students who experience SEBD. It was evident from themes that emerged in the CA that the LA placed great emphasis on the quality of the NHP and collaboration between different agencies thus attending to Every Child Matters policy. According to Bronfenbrenner, the most important aspect of ecological systems theory is the 'interplay' and relationships among the programme, its participants, their parents and external agencies. Collaboration was seen as co-ordinated external agencies' support from the LA, local schools, the Youth Offending Team and the Educational Psychologist, which resulted in a reduction in criminal and anti-social behaviour, the attainment of set targets and co-operation with families/carers in relation to students' attainment and progression. Parental voice was invited in relation to parental consent to their child's attendance on an AEP and student voice was reflected through student surveys on their educational experiences and satisfaction with the NHP.

The macro-system 'refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems, of which micro-, meso- and exo-systems are the concrete manifestations' (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 81). The themes that related to the macro-system were programme policies and procedures, targets and quality assurance. Policies and procedures referred to behaviour management strategies, child protection, health and



safety, withdrawals and exclusions, complaints procedure and code of conduct employed on the NHP. Targets provided information on diagnostic tests and attainment, setting academic and behavioural SMART targets and student progression in education, employment and training post-16. Quality assurance referred to the evaluation of NHP and programme course reviews, staff CRB checks, lesson observations, staff training and development. These themes reflected the institutional, educational and legal requirements which were employed on the NHP.

The macro-system themes are in a direct relationship with the micro- and meso-systems themes. The more effectively the themes in micro- and meso- systems were implemented in the NHP, the better the outcomes for students would be. The examination of the college database provided an answer to the following question: ‘What is the NHP’s impact on students’ attendance, retention and achievement?’

The analysis of these outcomes showed that the achievement in the NHP was satisfactory when compared to national averages, although the retention was still lower than in mainstream schools indicating this as a main weakness of the NHP. Thus, the main area of improvement in the NHP would be an investigation into reasons for ‘drop-outs’ and a follow-up study on students who did not complete the NHP. This issue was addressed and further discussed in group discussion 2 and semi-structured interviews with the NHP’s heads.

The findings in this chapter indicated that the NHP’s processes and documentary evidence devised to record these processes responded effectively to the requirements set out by the CA between the NHP and the LA. This showed that the collaboration between different systems was successfully implemented in the NHP. The examination of the CA showed that aims, objectives and targets set out by the LA ensured that effective procedures were put in place in the NHP to implement, monitor and assess whether the NHP addressed and catered for individual students’ needs. This also indicated that the LA had addressed the important educational policy requirements set out in ECM which emphasised the student-centred approach and individualised learning for the most vulnerable group of students. The LA’s interactive approach showed that it implemented adequate quality assurance measures to ensure a high quality of AEP.

## CHAPTER 5 - THE FIELD RESEARCH

### 5.1 GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Flick (2002: 114) advocated the use of group discussions because they ‘correspond to the way in which opinions are produced, expressed and exchanged in everyday life’. In this study group discussions with the New Horizons Programme (NHP) staff were used for several reasons. First, this study is concerned with the evaluation of the NHP on which this group of staff was employed and as employees they have a direct interest in the NHP, its implementation and development. Second, the staff was involved in the day-to-day operation of the NHP and as such should have their voice in how the NHP was run and how it could be improved. Third, due to the researcher’s role as an insider who was also employed on the NHP, this method was favoured over observation which could have influenced visual perceptions as well as those based on hearing and feeling (Alder and Alder, 1998) in the observation of the field. For these reasons I decided that the staff’s involvement in the study was essential from the very outset, prior to devising the research questions and any data collection.

There were two group discussions with the NHP staff conducted in the course of this research. The first group discussion took place at the planning stage of the study. Its aim was fourfold: to outline the rationale for the research, to explain the intended outcomes of the study, to agree with staff the research questions to be posed by the study and to discuss the methods for data collection. The second group discussion took place after the collection of data from documentary evidence and its aim was to present to the NHP staff the findings from documentary evidence in order to elicit their views and perspectives on the NHP’s effectiveness, its strengths and weaknesses. Each group discussion took place outside of working hours but on the NHP premises. The choice of premises for conducting group discussions was an important consideration since it was necessary to conduct them in a natural environment rather than in artificial isolation from the milieu in which they had arisen.

The group was a 'natural group, existing in everyday life' (Flick, 2002: 115) who had a genuine interest in the issues raised by this study. It was a homogeneous group in a sense that they all held non-managerial roles and shared common values and interests in relation to their professional roles on the NHP. Researchers have warned about using natural groups because of their own established dynamics, relationships and hierarchies amongst them which could all impact on their contributions to discussions (Krueger and Casey, 2000). However, in this study, my role as the insider researcher was advantageous since I was aware of the group dynamics, relationships amongst the staff and in my role of a facilitator I was able to stimulate all the participants to contribute to discussions, express their views and respond to each other's opinions. Apart from this, the staff in this study was used to the setting of group discussion since the staff meetings that were taking place on a weekly basis were conducted in a similar manner in that the staff was invited to discuss openly issues arising on the NHP. In addition to staff meetings, the half-termly course evaluation (these were part of college's quality assurance processes) were undertaken in a similar way and the topics of these evaluations broadly reflected the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the NHP with the view to further improving and developing it.

The job requirements on this kind of programme often demanded prompt responses in usually unpredictable situations, and initiative and autonomous actions by individual members of staff. This meant that the staff had to develop their independence and communication skills and deal with situations 'ad hoc'. Bauer and Gaskell (2000: 46) wrote that such 'a group, as distinct from a number of people in the same location, is more than the sum of the parts: it becomes an entity in itself'. This was another advantage when conducting group discussions since the acquaintance with the staff and the insight into the group's dynamics made me more aware of the staff who were more reluctant to voice their opinions and made it easier to predict some of 'the twists and turns of the discussion', the issues often identified as problematic when group discussions are employed in research (Flick, 2002: 118). Moreover, I could prompt and invite the staff to express their views and perceptions openly without any fear of disturbing the group dynamics or suppressing social exchange amongst the participants.

First, the sampling strategy and staff characteristics are described in order to outline their expertise in dealing with the cohort of students who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Second, the research procedure for conducting group discussions is described. Third, the themes that emerged from group discussion 2 are examined and discussed. Finally, these themes are compared to those that emerged in documentary evidence.

## **5.2 SAMPLING AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS**

There were four learning support assistants (LSAs) and four teachers who participated in group discussions. The learning support assistants were all permanent members of staff who had worked on the NHP for more than four years at the commencement of the research project. This meant that they had substantial experience in working with this cohort. Two of them also had experience in running youth clubs. One LSA had worked in mainstream secondary schools and the other had worked in secondary schools that catered for students with special educational needs from profound to moderate and specific learning difficulties. This experience and expertise were seen as valuable by the NHP management whose approach was democratic in that it involved staff in decision-making concerning rules and discipline, course evaluation and curriculum design. The literature review on Alternative Educational Provisions (AEPs) in Chapter 2 also revealed that an autonomous and whole-school approach was of paramount importance in running this type of programme. My personal stance from my own experience in working with young people who experience SEBD is that due to the nature of work with this cohort, it is imperative to allow all the staff an autonomous approach to their work and to voice their opinions on various aspects of the programme. This model of leadership style is motivational and empowering for staff who, with appropriate guidance, are more committed and productive. A similar view was expressed by the staff during group discussions. Factors such as staff absences, attendance and commitment were seen as problematic due to lack of staff autonomy in the second stage of the NHP in academic years 2009-2011 compared to the first stage of the NHP implementation from 2004-2008 when such an approach was adopted.

There were three permanent members of teaching staff; two of them had been employed on the NHP for more than four years and one had worked on the programme for two years, and one temporary member of staff who had worked on the programme for just over a year at the time group discussion 1 took place. Like the LSAs, all the teaching staff had a rich experience in working with young people who experience SEBD and genuine interest in helping them to achieve and progress (the latter was indicated in students' questionnaires and semi-structured interviews). One of the teachers was also a Curriculum Team Leader (CTL) on the NHP but his role was not considered managerial by the Senior Management Team (SMT).

The information on the length of employment and the employment status of the staff is explained in more detail in the discussion part of this chapter under the heading 'staffing issues'.

As a researcher (and a teacher who was a permanent member of staff employed on the NHP for more than four years), I acted as a facilitator during group discussions and I saw my role as leading, directing and providing stimuli for group discussions. The term 'facilitator' is used rather than the term 'moderator' in order to prevent any influence or intervention by the researcher which could have altered and/or biased the discussion in process.

### 5.3 THE PROCEDURE FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The initial stimuli offered at the beginning of each group discussion included the questions and problems raised by the particular phase of the study. At the start of group discussion 1, the researcher outlined the rationale for the study and the research questions intended to be posed by the study. The staff were then invited to comment on these questions and to express their opinions on them. The initial research questions were then agreed with the staff. Following this, the methods for the data collection were suggested and explained in detail to the staff and the discussion on the type of evidence that was going to be used for the study took place. It was agreed that the documentary and archive evidence was necessary to be examined as the starting point in the NHP investigation. In group discussion 2, the findings from the

examination of documentary evidence were presented to the NHP staff and they were invited to discuss the NHP's strengths and weaknesses; its processes, inputs and outcomes; and to comment on their effectiveness in relation to students' engagement, achievement and progression. The group discussions were tape recorded and then transcribed. Following the transcription of the group discussions, the transcription notes were first coded and from these codes the emergent themes were identified. Since the study adopted an open communication approach, all the transcriptions and reports were accessible for staff viewing and any necessary corrections by the staff.

Following the first set of data collection from documentary evidence which constituted the descriptive and exploratory phase of the research, group discussion 2 was conducted. The aim of this group discussion was to present and report to the NHP staff the data which were collected in documentary evidence, to design the student and external agencies questionnaire and to decide the next steps in data collection. The rationale for reporting the findings from documentary evidence was to inform the staff about the NHP's outcomes for the students, to compare these outcomes for different academic years in order to elicit staff views on possible causes and effects of these differences and to check how well the findings were presented for the reader in the interim report that was produced. For example, the ICT teacher offered help in simplifying tables and graphs to make them more comprehensible to a wider range of audiences. The NHP staff were also presented with the draft of student questionnaire. In designing the questionnaire, I also used the themes identified in documentary evidence in order to uncover students' views on different aspects of the NHP. The questions in the questionnaires were then further discussed and refined with the staff. I explained the procedure and administration of questionnaire as well as the ethical considerations which needed to be taken into account.

Although the staff offered their help with the administration of questionnaires, I felt that it would not be fair to ask the staff for any additional assistance rather than checking the findings and identifying data collection since I was unable to offer any financial reward for their time already offered to this study. It was agreed that the next step in the data collection, following the student survey, was going to be semi-structured interviews with the NHP management and semi-structured interviews with the students. I explained the nature of the semi-structured interviews and identified

the topic guides for both types of interviews while emphasising that these guides were only as their label suggested and were likely to be altered and developed to recognise the important issues arising in each interview situation which might go beyond prior planning and expectations. The topic guides for semi-structured interviews with heads and students were constructed to reflect the themes that emerged from the first group discussion, questionnaires, documentary evidence and research questions posed by the study.

Group discussion 3 was planned to take place after the data were collected in the surveys and semi-structured interviews with heads and students but this was not feasible since a few members of the 'original' staff (who participated in group discussions 1 and 2) had either left or retired. Instead, the findings were emailed to all the staff, who were invited to comment and to offer their constructive feedback on these findings.

#### 5.4. SPECIFIC ETHICAL ISSUES

The further issues which needed to be considered in conducting group discussions with the NHP staff were specific ethical issues relating to informed consent, 'beneficence, respect and justice' (Sieber, 1992: 18). It was mentioned earlier in this section that an open communication approach in conducting this study was adopted which meant that the staff was informed of the aims, focus and benefits of the research prior to conducting the study and their voluntary consent was then obtained to participate in the study. The research questions, methods of data collection and the ways of protecting the confidentiality of all participants in the study were agreed in group discussion 1. 'Beneficence' refers to maximising the research outcomes with the aim of improving the programme while taking care to minimise any risks, harm or wrongdoing in conducting the study. 'Respect' relates to protecting the exercise of free will and showing respect to individual participants in the study. 'Justice' means the employment of 'fair, reasonable and non-exploitative procedures' during all stages of research (Sieber, 1992: 18). These terms were initially explained to and discussed with the staff in group discussion 1 and subsequently in group discussion 2 they were referred to and reiterated by the researcher.

The general ethical considerations relating to the whole study and the theoretical approaches to ethics have already been discussed in Chapter 3.

## 5.5 THEMES EMERGING FROM GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The codes and themes that emerged from group discussions have been summarised and presented in Table 5.1. Each theme is then explained and discussed under the separate heading in order to clarify meanings attached to them. It is worth noting that during the presentations of findings from documentary evidence, in particular students' achievement and retention outcomes, the staff felt that it would be necessary to distinguish between two different stages in the development of NHP. These were identified as an 'autonomous stage' (from academic years 2004/5 to 2008/9) and a 'non-autonomous stage' (from academic years 2009/10 to 2011/12). The terms 'autonomous' and 'non-autonomous' simply refer to the level of staff input and involvement in terms of decision-making on the day-to-day running of the NHP. These terms were suggested by the two teachers and the rest of the staff agreed that they were sufficiently descriptive of the NHP changes in these two periods.

### 5.5.1 Curriculum

In the first stage of NHP implementation from academic years 2004/5-2008/9, the curriculum offered on the NHP consisted of GCSEs in English, Mathematics and ICT. These 'academic' subjects were assessed partly through coursework (completed in class and internally assessed by the subject teachers and then externally verified by the examination boards) and partly through the end of year exam (externally assessed by the examination boards). In addition to these subjects prescribed by the national curriculum, students also studied BTEC subjects which were considered more 'vocational' compared to GCSEs. These subjects were assessed internally throughout the academic year and then verified externally by the examination board. The staff felt that the mixture of continuous and summative assessment, and academic and vocational subjects was beneficial for this cohort of students since it offered a broad education to them and allowed easier progression to post-16 education.



In the second stage of NHP implementation from academic years 2009/10-2010/11, the GCSE English and Mathematics qualifications were replaced by literacy and numeracy qualifications in 2009/10 and then functional skills in English and Mathematics in 2010/11. The ICT qualification was embedded in other subjects, mainly BTEC Vocational Studies, rather than offered as a 'stand alone' qualification. The staff was unanimous in their views that the abolition of GCSEs had a negative impact on students' motivation because they were not familiar with the alternative qualifications offered and thus did not see any value in studying them. Teacher 1 stated that 'Students felt that they were studying these subjects instead of GCSEs because they were not clever enough to do GCSEs'. However, the examination of students' achievement in the previous chapter revealed that the achievement in these subjects was higher than the achievement in GCSE English and Maths. The staff indicated that the achievement in these subjects was higher because the curriculum content and the assessment were very different when compared to GCSEs. They assessed different skills and were easier to achieve than the GCSE curriculum. The exams were also conducted 'on demand' which meant that students set the exam when they were ready. The staff noted that this was beneficial for students because with GCSE exams it was a set date and if they were not at college on the day of exam, they would not achieve their qualifications.

Apart from these accredited subjects, the staff identified the benefits of other subjects delivered on the NHP which were not formally assessed and there were no qualifications attached to them, such as Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE), tutorials and Physical Education (PE). Teacher 2 said 'I enjoy playing badminton and table tennis with them (students) in PE lessons. I am not very good in these sports so the students are able to beat me and they love it. I think it has a good impact on their self-esteem - being better than your teacher in something'. These subjects were designed to enhance students' social and emotional development, communication skills, research and presentation skills, employability and workplace skills.

Educational visits and trips were described by the staff as valuable experiences important for developing team-building and communication skills. They identified that these activities were beneficial as part of an induction and transition period when the students arrived on the programme and were seen as a type of icebreaker exercise.

Later on in the academic year, they were offered as an award for good work, behaviour or attendance. However, the staff asserted that there were often not enough financial resources for these visits and trips.

<b>Codes from group discussions</b>	<b>Themes from group discussions</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Staff experience	Staffing issues	4 Learning Support Assistants, 4 teachers (including myself as a researcher and a facilitator)
Staff expertise and interests	Staffing issues	
Committed staff	Staffing issues	
Permanent staff	Staffing issues	
Staff training	Staffing issues	
Liaison with parents/carers	Collaboration	
Liaison with referral agencies	Collaboration	
Liaison with educational psychology services	Collaboration	
Liaison with careers adviser	Collaboration	
Liaison with Youth Offending Team	Collaboration	
Liaison with Social Services	Collaboration	
Support for parents	Collaboration	
Attendance officer	Pastoral care	
One to one support	Pastoral care	
Approachable staff	Pastoral care	
Mentoring	Pastoral care	
Staff expectations (from students)	Pastoral care	
BTEC subjects	Curriculum	
Modular GCSEs	Curriculum	
Educational visits/trips	Curriculum	
Small classes	Pedagogy	
Positive approach to teaching and learning	Pedagogy	
Timetables	Pedagogy	
Student progress reviews	Record keeping	
Student representatives meetings	Student voice	
Staff meetings	Staff voice	
Staff autonomy in day-to-day decision making	Staff voice	
Whole school approach to rules, discipline and sanctions	Rules and discipline	

Table 5.1 Codes and Themes emerging from group discussions

### 5.5.2 Pastoral Care

One of the most important aspects of the NHP processes identified by the staff was pastoral care. This consisted of the presence of an attendance officer who was responsible for recording students' attendance and punctuality and reporting attendance and punctuality to parents/carers, referral agencies and the Local Authority (LA) in the form of letters on the weekly basis. In the first stage from 2004/5-2008/9 there was an attendance officer who was employed on the NHP full-time on permanent basis. In the second stage from 2009/10-2010/11 this post was replaced by a full-time, temporary member of staff whose duties were similar to the one in the first stage but the difference was that the LA involvement on the NHP had diminished in that the attendance was not closely monitored by the Quality Assurance Manager (QAM).

Other important features of pastoral care offered on the NHP were one-to-one support provided to students by teaching and support staff, a mentoring scheme which consisted of LSAs and form tutors supporting individual students through short- and long-term target-setting, and finally having high expectations of the students, which the staff considered as the most important factor in students' progress. LSA 1 held that 'If they (students) see that you believe in them and that you think they can do something, they will try their best to please you'. These expectations included the identification of students' individual qualities, skills, abilities and knowledge in different subjects as well as in extracurricular areas, encouragement by staff to use and develop these attributes, working closely with parents and informing them regularly of their child's progression. Teacher 3 added 'I am often told by the parents how they were worried about receiving a phone call from a school because it was always bad news. They say that they like the fact that we phone them to give them good news too'.

Staff thought that having high expectations and aspirations for students enhanced their achievement and progression. However, the students were encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour, conduct, achievement and progression.

### 5.5.3 Pedagogy

The class sizes on the NHP were significantly smaller than class sizes in mainstream schools, with a maximum of 15 students per class. The staff thought that the most successful academic year in terms of students' retention, achievement and progression was 2008/9 when the class size consisted of 12 students. There were always two members of staff in the class, a class teacher and an LSA who was assigned to the class either as a mentor or a specialist in the subject area. A positive approach to teaching, learning and behaviour was emphasised by the staff as very important in building students' self-esteem and confidence in their own qualities, skills and abilities. It was described by the staff as constantly praising students for good work, behaviour and attendance; overlooking minor incidents of misbehaviour; tackling more serious incidents through encouraging students to take responsibility for their own actions and teaching them to consider the consequences arising from these actions. An award system was promoted by the staff and it involved the collection of merit marks, certificates and postcards sent home to their parents/carers. The design of timetables was also identified as important with 'academic' subjects being delivered in the morning sessions, 'vocational' subjects in the afternoons and PE, tutorials and PHSE sessions taking place on Monday mornings and Friday afternoons. The emphasis on literacy and numeracy sessions (each subject was offered four hours a week) was seen by the staff as essential in developing students' basic skills which in turn facilitated their progression into further education, employment and/or training. Teacher 4 noted 'I am always puzzled with the fact that the majority of these students do not have any specific learning difficulties, yet they did not acquire their basic skills in English and Maths in all of the years they spent in school'.

### 5.5.4 Staffing issues

Staff expressed the opinion that the success of the NHP was related to staff experience, their expertise and interests in students and their lives, the staff approachability and the rapport they built with their students, staff commitment and staff training which was relevant to their job roles and responsibilities. They also thought that it was important to have permanent staff because students needed consistency and were sensitive to changes in staffing. One of the LSAs said 'when a

member of staff left, they felt that this was yet another person who abandoned them in their life and they were blaming themselves about it' (LSA 2). The staff indicated that the staffing changes in the second stage of NHP implementation from 2009/10-2011/12, when more temporary or less experienced staff was employed on the NHP, had had a negative impact on students' retention and achievement. This was further explored in the students' questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews with students and the NHP's heads.

#### 5.5.5 Collaboration

The staff identified that liaison and close collaboration with different external agencies was valuable for students. They listed this collaboration in order of importance: parents/carers came in the first place since the staff reasoned that if there was no support from home and the parents/carers were not responsive, it was very difficult to engage students in education. One teacher said 'we spend on average an hour a day , sometimes even more, talking to parents either over the phone or in face-to-face interviews be it to praise their child or to discuss discipline or other matters which arise' (Teacher 2). The rest of the staff confirmed this statement. The support and close relationship with referral agencies - local schools or Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) - was emphasised because of their deeper insight and knowledge of students' background and the support students received prior to coming on the NHP. Other external partners that were considered constructive in the support offered to students included: the educational psychology service, careers advisers, youth offending team and social services. In relation to students, their work consisted of expert support in specific areas identified prior to coming on the NHP by referral agencies or by the NHP staff after starting the programme. In relation to the NHP staff, they conducted staff training in their areas of expertise. The staff noted that this level of support by the LA significantly diminished in the second stage of the NHP implementation from 2009 due to changes in government funding and cuts in the public sector. The CTL, who closely liaised with the QAM from the LA, added that these changes and cuts implemented by the government coincided with the diminished influence of the LA on the NHP. The CTL said,

‘Prior to this we received a lot of support from the LA in terms of expert advice and support for students as well as staff training. I also attended monthly meetings with the QAM and had to report and justify any attendance or discipline issues and, although I saw it sometimes as cumbersome, it did serve as a quality check that public money is being well spent. Now all this support is gone. This is particularly detrimental for the students with special educational needs who come from disadvantaged background. It’s a vicious circle for them – without adequate support they cannot gain qualifications and without qualifications they cannot compete and secure their place in the labour market’.

However, in the same period the college saw positive changes in terms of pastoral care for all of its students in the introduction of safeguarding officers responsible for child protection issues and opportunity coaches responsible for issues of general support in terms of students’ motivation, attendance and progression.

#### 5.5.6 Record keeping

Keeping records on students’ backgrounds, causes of disaffection, medical information, disciplinary issues, progression reviews, communication with other agencies involved as well as communications with parents/carers and any other relevant information was seen by the staff as essential. This information was kept in each student’s personal file (see Appendix 6 for the contents of students’ personal files). The staff thought that sharing of information on students amongst different agencies was necessary in identifying their needs, putting in place adequate support and enhancing students’ progression. From this information relevant short- and long-term targets were agreed and set for students. The staff felt that although the emphasis was placed on information sharing, in some cases certain referral agencies or parents/carers were reluctant to release certain sensitive or confidential information because they feared that this would jeopardise a student’s acceptance onto the NHP. This made it difficult to cater for each individual’s needs in the most efficient manner and to arrange sufficient support for these students. This was often the case when students had mental health issues, were members of a gang, had a record of serious criminal offences against persons or a record of carrying offensive weapons.

### 5.5.7 Rules and discipline

A whole-school approach to rules, discipline and sanctions was advocated by the staff. This approach allowed all the staff to address issues of discipline and was exercised in the first stage of the NHP implementation. The staff contrasted this approach to the new approach introduced in academic year 2009/10 which disempowered some non-managerial staff by not allowing them to discipline students. Namely, only the CTL was given the power to discipline students. The staff identified that this second approach did not have a positive impact on students' improvement in behaviour and that it undermined the authority of the rest of the staff which resulted in more incidents and problematic behaviour by the students. Following this, the staff made a complaint to senior management and the old system was reintroduced. The staff claimed that the whole-school approach to discipline reduced the number of serious incidents since the minor incidents were dealt with immediately by the member of staff in question. The staff also asserted that involvement of parents/carers in the disciplinary procedure was beneficial since it made it clearer for parents/carers why their child had been disciplined and prevented any misunderstandings and misconceptions in relation to the disciplinary procedure or sanctions.

These changes in disciplining students resulted in more students being excluded from the NHP in 2009/10 which explained the low retention in this academic year although the students' numbers were low. The staff also reported that in this academic year more agency staff, who were not experienced and did not possess relevant expertise in SEBD, were employed which could have also resulted in the more problematic behaviour of students.

### 5.5.8 Staff voice

The staff clearly identified the importance of exercising autonomy in day-to-day decision-making which took their views into account. They felt that this was not sufficiently exercised in the second stage. However, they agreed that staff meetings had always been an important forum in which key issues arising in relation to students, the NHP processes or any other matters were discussed and addressed in a constructive manner.

### 5.5.9 Student voice

Student representatives' meetings were identified as an important forum in which student representatives elected by their peers from each class on the NHP were encouraged to express their views and give suggestions about various aspects of the NHP which they thought needed improving. It was led by an independent chair (often an administration assistant who was not with students in class) and took place on a termly basis. The staff reported that in the second stage of programme implementation these meetings were not encouraged enough by the members of staff including the CTL and NHP management.

## 5.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Themes that emerged from group discussion 2 corroborated the themes from the documentary evidence. The staff identified pastoral care that was implemented on the NHP as one of its main strengths. The pastoral care consisted of monitoring students' attendance, punctuality and progress in terms their behaviour and academic achievement through short- and long-term targets setting and the record keeping. Closely linked to this theme was collaboration with other agencies involved in the young people's lives: parents being the most important in supporting their children's development, referral agencies and other external agencies that might have been supporting individual students. The support from the LA was seen as crucial in the involvement of other agencies on the NHP, in supporting any training needs for the NHP staff and in monitoring the overall performance of the NHP. The importance of a positive approach towards teaching, learning and behaviour was described in pedagogy adopted on the NHP, staff characteristics and the disciplinary procedures based on a whole-school approach. The NHP staff considered that the curriculum that was implemented on the NHP needed to be motivational for students including the core qualifications that are offered in mainstream schools and the extracurricular activities designed to develop other employability skills alongside the academic and vocational skills. They emphasised the benefits of continuous assessment and 'on demand' examinations. The emphasis was also placed on the importance of voicing staff and students' opinions in the implementation and development of the NHP and its evaluation.



They concluded that the NHP produced the best outcomes when the overall cohort was smaller and the class sizes consisted of 10-12. The comparison of cohort size with the retention and achievement rates in the previous chapter also indicated that when the number of students enrolled on the NHP was lower, the retention and achievement were higher. The only exception to this was in academic year 2009/10 when the retention was low although the cohort size was small. The staff's view was that this was due to the changes in curriculum, staffing, rules and discipline which were all identified by the staff as having a direct impact on students' achievement and retention in this academic year. The staff also noted that parental support and regular communications with parents/carers also had a positive impact on students' retention.

The themes that emerged in the examination of documentary evidence and group discussions were further explored through the students' questionnaire analysis in the next chapter to elicit students' views on these features of the NHP.

Later on in this thesis in Chapter 9, the findings from all data are compared to examine whether there is a cause and effect relationship between the identified themes and the NHP outcomes. The commonalities and differences are discussed and compared to findings in other AEPs described in the literature review in Chapter 2. These findings form the basis for the final discussion in Chapter 10 following the collection and synthesis of all the data examined in this study.

## CHAPTER 6 – FIELD RESEARCH

### 6.1 THE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The aim of the student questionnaire was to elicit students' views on their experience of education during the time they attended the NHP at the college, to examine their opinions on various aspects of the NHP and to find out about their destinations after they completed the NHP.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) used both closed and open questions. The first seven questions were closed questions and they offered scaled responses. These types of questions enabled the researcher to count how many respondents expressed certain views. The closed questions were also aimed at engaging respondents' attention at the beginning of the questionnaire by allowing them to provide straightforward answers. The questions 8-14 were open questions that did not suggest categories of responses but allowed respondents the freedom to answer these questions in a way that seemed the most appropriate to them.

The analysis of questionnaires was conducted in three stages (Munn, 2004, p. 39). The first stage consisted of the preparation of data. Each closed question (from Q1 to Q7) was organised in a separate table. The five-response categories, the number of total cohort, and the number and percentage of total respondents were displayed in rows whereas different academic years were placed on the top of each column to allow easier comparison of data across academic years at the interpretation stage. The framework for organising the answers to the open questions (from Q8 to Q14) was not created in advance. Instead, the themes were derived from the data. The advantages of generating themes from the data rather than pre-setting the themes are threefold. First, it is easier to double check these themes by another researcher which increases the reliability of findings. Second, it does not impose the researcher's predetermined prejudices so the risk of biasing the results is minimised. Third, it ensures that all the statements given in responses are 'captured'.

In the second stage the data were described. The scaled responses in each closed question were counted and the total numbers and percentages were entered into relevant cells according to the scaled responses as well as academic years in which

students attended the programme (see tables 6.1-6.7 below). The questionnaires were anonymous. However, in the consent letters which were sent to the respondents alongside the questionnaire, I entered the academic year in which they attended the NHP. It was emphasized in the consent letter that only the relevant academic year was needed and not the name of the respondent. I also explained that the information on the year of attendance of the programme was necessary in order to be able to compare the respondents' views and opinions in different academic years. The responses in questions 12 and 13 on students' progression accounted for students' numbers and percentages of those who progressed in education, employment, training or were NEET and they are presented in tables 6.12 and 6.13. For open questions the following procedure was applied: first, the responses on each question were summarised into simple statements; second, similar statements were grouped together and third, the relevant theme, derived from data was attached to each group of statements. This procedure was repeated for each open question. These statements and themes were also entered into separate tables for each open question (see tables 6.8-6.11 below).

The third stage in analysing students' questionnaires was the interpretation of the data in the tables. The responses for the closed questions were counted separately for different academic years since the researcher needed to identify whether the students' views and opinions on different aspects of the NHP varied in different academic years. Namely, the staff's views expressed during group discussions referred to changes in curriculum and staffing, from the academic year 2009/10 to 2011/12, as having a negative impact on students' motivation, attendance, retention and achievement. The examination of these outcomes i.e. students' retention, attendance and achievement rates in documentary evidence also indicated some differences in the two stages of the programme implementation. The responses for each question were compared across different academic years and then interpreted. Contrary to the responses found in the closed questions, the themes that emerged from the analysis of the open questions in students' questionnaires did not indicate any differences in students' responses in these two stages. For this reason, the responses were not shown separately for different academic years. Instead the themes that emerged in open questions were interpreted and compared to responses in closed questions.

## 6.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF CLOSED QUESTIONS

In this section the results for each closed question are presented in tables and then interpreted. The results are analysed and compared across different academic years. The response rates and results are then summarised for each academic year.

*Q1. How was your experience of education during the time you attended the NHP in the College of East End?*

Table 6.1 Question 1 responses

Q1	2008		2009		2010		2011	
Q1	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	8	32	6	31	4	22	-	-
Good	12	48	10	53	8	44	20	56
Average	5	20	3	16	6	33	16	44
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	
Total responses	25	57	19	70	18	72	36	90

The first question in the students' questionnaire asked the respondents about their educational experiences while on the NHP. 'Excellent' experience was reported by one third of the respondents in academic years 2008/9 and 2009/10 and one fifth in 2010/11. There were no students with 'excellent' experience in 2011/12. Overall, almost half of those who responded identified their experience as 'good' except in 2010/11 when 'good' was chosen by 44 per cent. 'Average' experience was noted by one fifth in 2008/9, 16 per cent in 2009/10, one third in 2010/11 and 44 per cent in 2011/12. There were no students who reported 'poor' or 'very poor' experience in these four academic years.

*Q2. How would you rate the general atmosphere in the College in motivating you and helping you to achieve and progress (eg. lessons within other departments in college, other teachers and staff in college, out-of-classroom activities etc)?*

Table 6.2 Question 2 responses

Q2	2008/9		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12	
Q2	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	6	24	4	21	3	17	4	11
Good	14	56	11	58	10	55	24	67
Average	5	20	4	21	5	28	8	22
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	
Total responses	25	57	19	70	18	72	36	90

Students' responses on question 2 indicated that over half of the respondents experienced 'good' overall atmosphere in college across different academic years with the highest rate at 67 per cent in academic year 2011/12. In 2008/9 almost one quarter of the respondents rated the overall college experience as 'excellent', lower proportions of one fifth in 2009/10, 17 per cent in 2010/11 and 11 per cent in 2011/12. Around one fifth of the cohort in academic years 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2011/12 rated the general atmosphere in college as 'average' with a higher rate at 28 per cent reported in academic year 2010/11. As with question 1, there were no respondents who chose 'poor' or 'very poor' options.

*Q3. Overall, how was the teachers' ability to motivate you to learn?*

Table 6.3 Question 3 responses

Q3	2008		2009		2010		2011	
Q3	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	8	32	3	16	6	33	-	-
Good	14	56	10	53	8	45	24	67
Average	3	12	6	31	4	22	12	33
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	
Total responses	25	57	19	70	18	72	36	90

Question 3 examined students' views on the teachers' ability to motivate them to learn. In academic years 2008/9 and 2010/11 one third of the cohort considered it as 'excellent', whereas only 16 per cent chose 'excellent' option in 2009/10 and there were no 'excellent' responses to this question in 2011/12. As in question 2, half of the cohort in 2008/9 and 2009/10 opted for 'good', and 45 per cent in 2010/11 with the highest rate of 67 per cent in academic year 2011/12. The lowest rate at 12 per cent for 'average' was in 2008/9, one third in 2009/10 and 2011/12, and one fifth of the cohort in 2010/11. There were no 'poor' or 'very poor' scores recorded for teachers' ability to motivate students.

*Q4. How did the course on the NHP prepare you for your future education or training?*

Table 6.4 Question 4 responses

Q4	2008		2009		2010		2011	
Q4	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	9	36	4	21	5	28	-	-
Good	10	40	12	63	8	44	28	78
Average	6	24	3	16	5	28	8	22
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	
Total responses	25	57	19	70	18	72	36	90

Students' responses on the impact of the NHP on their future education or training showed that in 2008/9 over a third of the cohort selected 'excellent', in 2009/10 one fifth, 28 per cent was recorded in 2010/11 and in 2011/12 there were no 'excellent' responses. 'Good' impact was reported by 40 per cent in 2008/9, 63 per cent in 2009/10, 44 per cent in 2010/11 and 78 per cent in 2011/12. 'Average' impact was detected by one quarter of respondents in 2008/9, 16 per cent in 2009/10, 28 per cent in 2010/11 and one fifth in 2011/12. Again there were no students who chose 'poor' or 'very poor' categories for this question.

*Q5. How would you rate the relevance of the qualifications you achieved on the NHP to your future education, training or employment?*

Table 6.5 Question 5 responses

Q5	2008		2009		2010		2011	
Q5	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	8	32	2	11	3	17	8	22
Good	12	48	6	31	2	11	8	22
Average	5	20	11	58	13	72	16	44
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	11
Very poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	
Total responses	25	57	19	70	18	72	36	90

The examination of the relevance of the qualifications indicated 'excellent' responses by one third of the respondents in 2008/9, only 11 per cent in 2009/10, 17 per cent in 2010/11 and one fifth of the cohort in 2011/12. 'Good' was identified by 48 per cent in 2008/9, one third in 2009/10, only 11 per cent in 2010/11 and one fifth of the cohort in 2011/12. 'Average' score was rated by one fifth in 2008/9, over half of the cohort in 2009/10, a high rate of 72 per cent in 2010/11 and 44 per cent in 2011/12. In 2011/12 there were 11 per cent of students who rated relevance of qualifications as 'poor'.

*Q6. How would you rate the help and support you received from the teaching and learning support staff on NHP?*

Table 6.6 Question 6 responses

Q6	2008		2009		2010		2011	
Q6	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	9	36	8	42	7	39	8	22
Good	14	56	9	47	7	39	16	44
Average	2	8	2	11	4	22	8	22
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	11
Very poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	
Total responses	25	57	19	70	18	72	36	90

Students' perceptions on help and support they received by staff on the NHP were rated 'excellent' by over one third of respondents in 2008/9, 42 per cent in 2009/10, 39 per cent in 2010/11 and only one fifth of the cohort in 2011/12. 'Good' scored 56 per cent in 2008/9, 47 per cent in 2009/10, 39 per cent in 2010/11 and 44 per cent in 2011/12. The 'Average' option on help and support was selected by only 8 per cent in 2008/9, 11 per cent in 2009/10, and one fifth of the cohort in academic years 2010/11 and 2011/12. In 2011/12 there were 11 per cent of students who thought that help and support they received by the staff on the NHP was 'poor'.

*Q7. How was the behaviour of students managed by the staff on the NHP?*

Table 6.7 Question 7 responses

Q7	2008		2009		2010		2011	
Q7	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Excellent	6	24	3	16	4	22	4	11
Good	14	56	6	31	8	45	12	33
Average	5	20	8	42	6	33	11	31
Poor	0	0	2	11	0	0	5	14
Very poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	11
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	
Total responses	25	57	19	70	18	72	36	90



Question 7 investigated students' views on the management of students' behaviour by the staff. 'Excellent' was reported by one quarter of respondents in 2008/9, 16 per cent in 2009/10, one fifth in 2010/11 and only 11 per cent of the cohort in 2011/12. 'Good' was observed by 56 per cent in 2008/9, one third of respondents in 2009/10, 45 per cent in 2010/11 and one third in 2011/12. 'Average' was chosen by one fifth in 2008/9, a higher rate of 42 per cent in 2009/10, and one third of the cohort in academic years 2010/11 and 2011/12. 'Poor' management of behaviour was identified by 11 per cent in 2009/10 and by 14 per cent of the cohort in 2011/12. In 2011/12, a high rate of 11 per cent considered that behaviour management was 'very poor'.

### 6.2.1 CLOSED QUESTIONS SUMMARY

Students' responses on closed questions showed that their experience of education and their views on various aspects of the programme varied in different academic years.

The highest scores for all questions were detected in academic year 2008/9. However, the low response rate of only 57 per cent of the students in this academic year means that the results cannot be regarded as representative of the whole cohort due to the small cohort number. A higher response rate could have altered the overall scores.

Although the response rate in 2009/10 was higher by 13 per cent than in the previous year, it is still low at 70 per cent to consider it as representative of the whole cohort again due to small cohort number. In this academic year, the 'excellent' and 'good' options were high for question 1 (experience of education on the NHP), question 2 (overall college experience), question 4 (preparation for future education and training) and question 6 (help and support from the staff). The lower scores were recorded for question 3 (teachers' ability to motivate students to learn), questions 5 (the relevance of qualifications) and 7 (the management of behaviour).

The response rate in 2010/11 was 72 per cent which was higher than in the previous two years but still not high enough to represent the whole cohort's views. In this

academic year, two thirds of cohort reported their experience of education on the NHP as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. A high scores for ‘excellent’ and ‘good’ were recorded for question 2 (overall college experience), question 3 (teachers’ ability to motivate students to learn), question 4 (preparation for future education and training) and question 6 (help and support from the staff). Two thirds of cohort considered the management of students’ behaviour by staff as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. A low score was detected on question 5 which considered views on the relevance of qualifications.

The highest response rate of 90 per cent was in the academic year 2011/12 The higher response rate in this academic year can be taken as representative of this cohort. In this academic year there were no ‘excellent’ responses to question 1 although just over 50 percent of students rated their experience of education on the NHP as ‘good’. High rates for ‘excellent’ and ‘good’ were identified for questions 2 (overall college experience) and 4 (preparation for future education and training). Low rates were recorded on question 5 on relevance of qualifications and question 7 on the management of behaviour. The responses on questions 1 (experience of education on the NHP), 3 (teachers’ ability to motivate students to learn) and 6 (help and support from the staff) scored lower than in the previous academic years.

### 6.3 THE INTERPRETATION OF OPEN QUESTIONS

Students’ responses on open questions are shown in the tables below. In the first column students’ statements are recorded and the second column shows themes that were attached to each of these statements. Each open question was then interpreted and compared to responses on closed questions.

Table 6.8 Results from question 8 – *whether benefited from attending the NHP and why*

STUDENTS' STATEMENTS	THEMES /Benefited
Improved my behaviour	Behaviour
Helped me to get on another course in this college	Progression
Helped me to get on another course in another college	Progression
Helped me to get my qualifications	Qualifications
Helped me to improve my English and Maths	Basic skills
I don't bunk any more, I attend my lessons	Attendance
It gave me a second chance, I was excluded from school	Second chance
I completed work in lessons, I never did this at school	Attitude towards education
It gave me experience of being in college	College experience
It was easier to complete work, you get help	Quality of teaching
STUDENTS' STATEMENTS	THEMES/Not benefited
It's not real learning	Quality of teaching
Work was too easy	Quality of teaching
We didn't get to do GCSEs	Qualifications
You should offer more academic subjects	Qualifications
Some teachers couldn't manage students' behaviour	

The first open question (question 8 in the students' questionnaire) asked the respondents whether they had benefited from attending the NHP and why. Those who considered that they had benefited listed the following reasons: improvement in behaviour, attendance, basic skills, attitude towards work in lessons and attitude towards education; progression on another course post-16; experience of being in college; better quality of teaching and gaining qualifications. The others who thought that they had not benefited gave the following reasons: poor quality of teaching and poor qualifications.

The benefits from attending the NHP identified above match the overall responses in question 4 above which indicated that the NHP had offered good preparation for future education and training. Despite the low scores on 'excellent' or 'poor' options in question 5 on the relevance of qualifications, the students across different academic years identified in question 8 that they benefited from attending the NHP because it helped them to achieve qualifications which enabled their progression into further education and training. However, those who said they did not benefit from attending the programme noted that the programme did not offer GCSEs and that the quality of teaching was poor (in 2011/12, 11 per cent was recorded in question 6 on help and support from the teaching and learning support staff).

Table 6.9 Students' views on the NHP's strengths

Staff were very helpful	Supportive staff
Help from Learning Support in class	Supportive staff
Good support from staff	Supportive staff
You get help in lessons	Supportive staff
Teaching was good	Quality of teaching
Good Maths lessons	Quality of teaching
Interesting English lessons	Quality of teaching
Small classes	Learning environment
Staff spoke to you like adults	Adult environment
Staff treat you like adults	Adult environment
I like everything	

In question 9 students were asked to state the main strengths of the NHP. The respondents identified the following programme's strengths: supportive staff, adult environment, good quality of teaching and learning environment. The programme's strengths identified by the students matched their views in questions 2 on the overall experience of being in the college. Although the responses in question 3 and 6 varied across different academic years, the overall scores on teachers' ability to motivate students to learn and the help and support received from the staff were identified by more than a half of the cohorts as 'excellent' or 'good'.

Table 6.10 Students' opinions about the NHP's weaknesses

Teachers were not strict like in school	Discipline
Calming down students when everyone is hyper	Behaviour management
Improve computer rooms	ICT resources
Behaviour was sometimes bad	Behaviour management
Not being allowed outside of college at lunch	
Not that much learning	Quality of teaching
Nothing	
Teachers moan a lot if work not done	Motivating students to learn
We didn't do GCSEs	Curriculum

The NHP's weaknesses were examined in question 10. The respondents identified the following weaknesses: discipline, ICT resources, management of behaviour by the staff, quality of teaching, not being allowed to leave college premises during lunch break, teachers' lack of ability to motivate students to learn and curriculum. The above weaknesses corresponded to the responses in question 7 which recorded lower scores on behaviour management by the staff than on other aspects of the NHP.

Table 6.11 Students' opinions about improving the NHP

More practical courses	Vocational course
More choices in terms of vocational courses	Vocational course
More subjects	Curriculum
Better learning environment	Learning environment
More trips	Extracurricular activities
More equipment	Resources
Better computers	Resources
Change everything you are doing at the moment	
None	
More learning	Quality of teaching
Better teachers	Quality of teaching

Students' views on the improvement of the NHP were examined in question 11. There were several suggestions made by the respondents on how the programme could be improved. These included the introduction of more vocational courses, the improvement in the curriculum in terms of the variety of subjects offered, improvement of learning environment and resources, more choice in terms of extracurricular activities and the quality of teaching.

These responses matched the views on the relevance of qualifications in question 5.

The progression of students into further education, training and employment in Year 12, after the completion of the NHP, was recorded from their responses in question 12. These results were also checked against the records kept on the NHP's database on progression hence they showed the progression of the total cohort and not just of those who completed questionnaires. The numbers and percentages for students' progression are shown in table 6.12.

Table 6.12 *Students' progression in Year 12*

Academic year/ Progression to	2008		2009		2010		2011	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Education	39	80	22	81	21	84	34	85
Training	2	4	-		-		-	
Employment	5	10	2	7	2	8	1	2
Total progression	46	94	24	88	23	92	35	87
Total Cohort	49		27		25		40	

The college database was checked at the later stage in each academic year and it showed that from 2008/9 cohort there were three students who ‘dropped out’ from education in academic year 2009/10. From 2009/10 cohort there were also three students who did not complete courses on which they progressed in the next academic year. From 2010/11 cohort there were four students who did not complete their post-16 courses. The destination of these students was not known.

In 2011/12 there were two students who ‘dropped out’ from their courses by January 2013. At the time of follow up, in June 2013, they were not in education, training or employment.

The majority of students who did not complete their courses in Year 12 of their education stated that they found courses too difficult, their behaviour or attendance were still a problem or they did not find courses relevant to their future careers.

In question 13 students were asked about their current status in terms of education, training and employment.

Table 6.13 Students’ current status in terms of education, training and employment

Academic year/ Current status	2008		2009		2010		2011	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Education	15	44	10	53	10	56	33	91
Training	4	8	-	-	-		-	
Employment	6	12	4	21	5	27	1	3
NEET	-		5	26	3	17	2	6
Total respondents	25		19		18		36	

#### 6.4 THEMES EMERGING FROM STUDENTS’ QUESTIONNAIRES

The closed questions were designed to examine the students’ views on the themes that emerged in the examination of documentary evidence and group discussions: the NHP and college experience, quality of teaching, curriculum, pedagogy, progression, pastoral care and approach to discipline.

The aim of open questions 8-11 was to further probe students' views on whether they benefited or not from attending the NHP and on specific features of the NHP in order to identify any other themes that were not addressed in the closed questions. Questions 12 and 13 addressed the students' progression after the completion of the NHP in order to obtain accurate information on their progression post-16 and to answer the second part of research question 2: what was the NHP's impact on students' progression?

The themes were divided into two groups: those that related to students' personal outcomes and those that related to the NHP. These themes were then discussed in relation to findings from other data analysis, literature review and conceptual framework adopted in this study.

#### 6.4.1 THEMES RELATING TO STUDENTS' OUTCOMES

The themes that related to students' outcomes emerged from responses to questions 8, 12 and 13 and they referred to attendance, behaviour, achievement and progression. The students identified that they benefited from attending the NHP since their behaviour, attendance and attitude towards education had improved. This was also confirmed in the investigation of documentary evidence on students' retention, attendance and achievement and in group discussion 2. The literature review on other alternative educational programmes (AEPs) recorded similar outcomes for students that attended them. In relation to students' progression post-16, the records showed that although a high percentage of students enrolled on courses following the completion of the NHP, there was still a high percentage of students who did not complete their courses in the post-16 phase. Further examination with the staff who teach on mainstream courses and the NHP management was needed to identify the reasons for high 'drop outs'. The informal feedback from students who were still in contact with the NHP staff indicated that this was often due to problems with attendance, behaviour, disengagement and not seeing the relevance of qualifications they were gaining. This has important implications for the further education providers who accept students who experience SEBD on their courses in terms of students' engagement, curriculum offer and delivery, organisation of courses in terms of

recording students' attendance and managing the challenging behaviour of their students. I mentioned in the previous chapter that the college within which the NHP operated employed safeguarding officers and opportunity coaches to address the issues of students' attendance, engagement and progression.

The responses from closed questions indicated that students experienced good education on the NHP, enjoyed the college environment and that these experiences prepared them well for future education and training. However, they considered that the qualifications they gained on the NHP were not relevant to their future education, training and employment. This has important implications for the implementation of curriculum on the NHP.

#### 6.4.2 THEMES RELATING TO THE NHP

The themes that related to investigation of the NHP emerged from responses to Questions 9, 10 and 11 which examined the students' views on the main strengths, weaknesses and improvements to be made on the NHP. These themes referred to college experience, learning environment, curriculum, quality of teaching, discipline, resources and pastoral care.

The responses from students' questionnaires revealed that the students enjoyed and valued the experience of being in the college because of its adult environment and different approach to teaching (e.g. smaller classes, support in classes). The students identified the importance of supportive staff and help the NHP staff offered to them. The ecological systems theory advocates the involvement and close relationships amongst different systems in helping young people who experience SEBD to progress successfully into their adulthood. The collaboration amongst different agencies involved with this cohort was evident from the examination of documentary evidence and group discussions with the NHP staff.

Those students who thought that they did not benefit from attending the NHP indicated that the quality of teaching and qualifications offered needed to be improved. It is important to note here that the same respondents who referred to not doing GCSEs also mentioned that the quality of teaching needed to be improved. This data corroborated with the data from group discussions which identified the issues



with the development of curriculum and staffing issues in the second stage of the NHP implementation. The main weaknesses identified by the respondents to the students' questionnaire indicated that the approach to discipline was not always appropriate and that the curriculum offered on the NHP needed more variety in terms of vocational courses, extracurricular activities and the implementation of core qualifications such as GCSEs. The students also thought that there needed to be improvement in these areas as well as in resources used on the NHP. The findings that related to the NHP matched the findings from the evaluation of other AEPs which showed that the pastoral care adopted on these programmes and an experience of attending college as an adult environment had a positive impact on students' re-engagement with education.

The themes that were identified from the analysis of students' questionnaires were further discussed in semi-structured interviews with both students and the NHP's heads.

The findings from students' questionnaires answered research questions 2 on the students' views and their experiences of the NHP and the second part of question 1 on the NHP's impact on students in relation to their attendance, behaviour, achievement and progression post-16.

The next stage of the NHP evaluation consisted of semi-structured interviews with students. The aim of these interviews was to explore in more depth the findings and themes emerging from the analysis of students' questionnaires and from other data, and to reveal more details on students' needs and how these needs could be met by the NHP.

At a later stage, the results from the students' questionnaire are compared to the results from the semi-structured interviews as well as to the results from group discussions, documentary evidence and semi-structured interviews with the NHP's heads. These findings form the basis for discussion on what type of programme and curricula successfully re-engage young people who experience SEBD and as a consequence of their SEN are at most risk of becoming NEET following their compulsory education. They also have implications for mainstream schools and their inclusion policies in the context of students who experience SEBD, the curriculum they offer and the pastoral care they provide for their students.

## CHAPTER 7 – STUDENT INTERVIEWS RESULTS

The interviews were conducted at different locations due to the fact that some students were not attending college any more. The interviews with these students took place in the local youth club. Those students who were still at college were interviewed in a quiet area of the college. Those students who completed the NHP in the same year in which they had been interviewed were contacted later on in the academic year in order to check their progression post-16.

I wished to select the students for the interviews to represent each cohort that was examined in the study as well as those students who ‘dropped out’ from the NHP. However, I did not succeed in contacting any students who attended the NHP in academic years 2004/5 and 2005/6 nor the students who dropped-out from the NHP since their destinations were unknown. Nevertheless, the students who were interviewed did represent the extreme cases in the sense that some of them did and some did not successfully progress into education, training and employment following the completion of the NHP. Prior to selecting the students for interviewing, I divided students into two groups: those who progressed to post-16 education, training and employment following the completion of the NHP and those who either progressed but subsequently ‘dropped out’ in the same academic year or did not progress to further education, training or employment. I then selected randomly one student from each group for each cohort. However, only one student from both 2006/7 and 2007/8 responded. The responses from students’ interviews were used to devise the case studies on each interviewee and the case studies are presented in the next section. The case studies thus represent all those who were interviewed.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. I explained to the interviewees that I had decided to conduct this study with the aim of improving the NHP for students in the future. Therefore, I wanted to explore the views of students who attended the NHP on different aspects of the programme. The ethical issues of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation in the study were also outlined to each interviewee and they were given the consent form to sign which listed these ethical considerations. I explained that in order to preserve anonymity, they would be given

different names in reporting the study. I also ensured them that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time if they wished so. Further, I explained to the interviewees that should they disclose any information that could raise safeguarding or health and safety issues, I would need to disclose these issues to relevant agencies.

The students seemed relaxed about being selected for the interviews. This was probably due to the fact that they were familiar with the interviewer whom they had all known as their teacher while they were attending the NHP. As a result, they were forthcoming in answering the questions and discussing the features of the NHP which they thought were important for them. They were encouraged to feel free to address any issues they thought were not addressed on the NHP and to give suggestions how it could be improved reminding them that the aim of this research was the improvement of the NHP.

The themes for interviews were selected on the basis of questionnaire analysis and intended to explore in more detail questionnaire responses. They also addressed and explored the themes that emerged from group discussions with the NHP staff and documentary evidence where appropriate. There was a danger that students might have felt that they were expected to give answers to the questions raised by the interviewer which would favour their experiences on the NHP since they were interviewed by their former teacher. However, their responses revealed that they were critical of some aspects of the NHP and that they felt comfortable to give a truthful picture of their experiences.

Prior to conducting the interviews with young people, the referral forms were examined for each student who was interviewed to detect any SEN and their ability in core subjects/academic ability and reasons for referral. This was also examined in the interviews to find out young people's perspectives on their exclusion or referral and the impact of different eco-systems on their disaffection with mainstream education. Of particular interest was the information about the young people's life circumstances in relation to their family, peers and school that possibly contributed to their disaffection with education and behavioural difficulties they experienced.

The students' responses from the interviews were then grouped in themes as they emerged through discussions that took place in the course of interview. The following themes were then recorded, discussed and supported by students' quotes: curriculum, pedagogy, discipline and pastoral care. The students' views on the overall NHP's strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement were also outlined in the discussion at the end of this chapter. Students' responses supplemented the responses in students' questionnaires providing an answer to the following research question: What are the students' views on the NHP's effectiveness?

## CASE STUDIES OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

### THE BACKGROUND OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Peter

Peter was excluded from school for continuous disruptive behaviour and was offered to come to the NHP by his Head of Year. Peter stated that both he and his mother wanted him to come to college because it would be a 'fresh start' for him and it would help him to achieve qualifications to enrol on a construction course after Year 11. Peter was described as having high ability in academic subjects but disengaged from learning. He enjoyed college because of its adult environment. He also said that he wanted to get good qualifications to help him get a well paid job so that he could support his mum who was not working.

He stated that he had a good relationship with some teachers at school who found him quite mature on a one-to-one basis but not in class. When asked what caused problems in school, Peter responded that

'In school some teachers were more understanding and they wouldn't shout at you but speak to you like an adult. But most teachers saw me as being disruptive and having a bad influence on others in class and stopping them from learning.'

He felt that the teachers in school did not want him there. He described that the problems in school started after an accident he had had,

‘I missed a lot of school because I was in the hospital and when I came back, they didn’t do anything to help me, I was behind with my GCSE coursework but most teachers didn’t offer no help. So I started playing up and disrupting classes. They told me that I’d be better off if I went to college.’

Peter did very well on the NHP and achieved higher grades in GCSE English and Mathematics exams than were predicted in his referral form. He was not disruptive in classes and seemed to have got on well with other students on the NHP.

Following the completion of the NHP, Peter enrolled on a construction course and completed his Level 2. He is now working in the construction industry but said he wished he had come to college earlier, maybe in Year 10 when all his troubles started at school.

Stewart

Stewart was excluded from school due to continuous disruptive behaviour and fights with his peers. He was described as experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and having high ability in English and Maths and was predicted to achieve grades B/C in both subjects in GCSE exams. The referral form also indicated that he had a criminal record (theft). Stewart described his experiences from school as frequently troublesome,

‘I was always getting excluded and had a lot of arguments at home with my mum because of troubles in school. She was fed up with all the meetings she had to attend with my school teachers.’

His father was remarried and although he was seeing him regularly, he felt that his father was not that interested in him. He said that his mum had little control over him although she was supportive and attended meetings with the NHP staff when

necessary. In communication with the NHP staff, she often expressed her concerns over Stewart's involvement with much older peers who were 'dragging him in trouble'.

He worked well in his classes although he was getting into arguments with some members of teaching staff. He never had a fight in college but some incidents of bullying other students were reported. Stewart always denied the bullying and described it as 'teasing or joking about'.

Stewart achieved predicted grades in GCSE English and Maths exams and progressed to another course in the college. He dropped out from the course because he did not see its relevance to what he wanted to do. He found a full-time job with his step-dad and said that this helped him to stay out of trouble because he did not have time any more to see his friends. He said he would like to go back to college eventually to achieve higher qualifications so that he could get a better job.

Frank

Frank was referred to the NHP due to persistent truancy and underachievement in school. He was described in a referral form as having a mild learning difficulty. He was predicted to achieve Grades F/G in his GCSE exams in English and Maths. Frank hated school and said that the main reason for truanting was to avoid doing work in classes which he found too difficult. He also had to take care of his mum who was disabled.

'I was often sent to 'exclusion unit' in school where I worked in a smaller group and got more help, but other pupils called this 'dummy classes'. They were bullying me because of it, but teachers always blamed me for causing trouble, they never saw others, just me.'

He also argued with his mum who often made excuses for his behaviour stating that teachers did not understand him. Frank's form tutor felt that his mum was not helping with this attitude and as a result he was not accepting responsibility for his behaviour

but rather blamed others for it. He stated that he enjoyed college more than school because he was getting a lot of support in his work as well as with his behaviour.

He noted that his behaviour and attendance improved on the NHP compared to school and he enjoyed coming to college because 'it was fun'. He also stated that he achieved his qualifications and got grade E in both GCSE English and Maths which was higher than predicted in school. He added that he would not have passed his exams in school. This helped him to enrol on a course after completing the NHP. Unfortunately, he dropped out from the mainstream course, he felt due to lack of support from teachers. He found the course too difficult. He also reported having a lot of problems at home with his mum who wanted him to 'get the job and earn some money'. However, in the following academic year he enrolled on another course in the same college and successfully completed it. He is now looking for a job.

## Richard

Richard was given an option to attend a college because of persistent truanting. He thought that the teachers in school 'wanted him out' although he was never excluded. He had a high ability in English but found Maths difficult. He was predicted to achieve grade B in English and grade E/F in Maths. He was not interested in doing academic subjects but preferred more practical work.

'Teachers were always saying to me that I could do better but I didn't enjoy subjects I studied in school, I only liked English because I was good at it and had the best teacher so I worked well in this class. In other classes I used to muck about a lot and disrupt others because I was so bored.'

He also stated that there were a lot of problems at home at that time too, his parents were getting divorced and his father, with whom he lived, was getting depressed. He added that he could not concentrate in his classes which would lead to arguments with teachers so he did not go to school. His father then took him off roll in school and asked school to refer him to college.

Richard worked well in college, his attendance was good and there were no issues with his behaviour. He successfully completed the NHP and achieved grade B in English and grade E in Maths exams. He enrolled on the mainstream course in the college and completed Level 1 qualifications. At the time of the interview, he was attending his Level 2 course. He stated that he enjoyed the course he was doing although he found it more difficult than the subjects he studied on the NHP. He was not sure whether he would continue his education on Level 3 because he had to find a job.

### Stephanie

Stephanie had a high ability in academic subjects but was disruptive in her lessons. She was described as experiencing SEBD. Stephanie chose to come to college because she was often getting in trouble with some girls in school. She stated that she was bullied by them but the teachers did not do anything about it. Her parents did not speak English very well so could not do much and could not explain to her teachers about the problems she was experiencing at school.

‘I used to get so bored in lessons because the work was easy and not very interesting. I wanted to do something that will get me a good job to help my family. I guess that’s why I didn’t like school, there was nothing I wanted to do. I often used to get into arguments with my teachers because they didn’t listen, you just got told to do things.’

At college there were no issues with her behaviour nor with other students in class. She was very keen to help other students who were less able. She was very able and worked hard in college because she knew that good grades would help her to enrol on a course she wanted to do. She stated that she wanted to do more academic subjects though because she wanted to go to University. She achieved grade C in both English and Maths exams.



After completing the NHP, she enrolled on another course in the college and stayed on for two years. At the time she was interviewed, she had a full-time job. Although she said that she was enjoying her job, she still wanted to go to university but said she couldn't afford it at the moment.

### Sylvie

Sylvie was referred to the NHP because of disruptive behaviour. She was identified as experiencing SEBD. She was predicted C grades in her GCSE exams in English, Maths and Science. She said that she found work in school easy but she did not want to do it. She said that her parents were constantly arguing and did not show any interest in her school.

‘I am not sure really why I didn't do well in school, the work was easy and I could do it. I think I just couldn't concentrate when others were naughty, I just wanted to join in and have a laugh with my mates.’

She thought that coming to college made her more mature in the sense that she realised that she had to take responsibility for her own learning. She said that her parents were much happier with her since she started attending college.

Sylvie had a few minor incidents in class at the beginning of the NHP course but her overall behaviour was good. She worked well in classes and was always willing to help the others. Sylvie achieved predicted grades in GCSE English and Maths.

Sylvie completed successfully the NHP and enrolled on another course. She is still studying and wants to get a job when she finishes college. In the meantime, she also had a baby but said that having a baby did not stop her from coming to college, she said ‘it actually made me more mature and motivated to finish the course so that I can get a better paid job’. She also added that her parents were helping a lot with the baby and that she could not have done it all on her own.

## William

William was excluded from school due to his involvement in fights with other pupils. He had a high ability in core academic subjects and was described as experiencing SEBD. He was also accused of bullying other pupils in school. He stated that he wanted to stay at school to complete his GCSEs but was not allowed because of his behaviour. His mum did not want him to come to college either because she thought that his behaviour would get worse.

‘I didn’t really want to come to college but I had to. I was always getting into fights in school and being blamed for them even when I didn’t start fights. It wasn’t fair, I don’t get in fights in college.’

Although he did not want to come to college, he recognised that college helped him to mature and behave in a more adult way. His mum was also happy with his progress in college. He worked well in classes and was keen to show his ability. He did not have any fights in college but he was reported for bullying a few times by his peers. He always denied this saying he was only joking. He often used to tease other students in class who could not do their work. Unfortunately, at the end of academic year when students were on study leave for their GCSE exams, he had an incident with another student on college premises. He was seen by a teacher holding another student in a ‘headlock’. In the disciplinary meeting he stated that he was provoked by the other student although this was the same student who had reported that William was bullying him. He was not excluded from college because he agreed to apologise and reconcile with the other student.

He achieved grade C in GCSE English and Maths exams. Although he achieved good grades on the NHP, he did not want to continue to study in college but went to work with relatives who worked in the construction business. He had the same job at the time of interview but said that he regretted leaving college because he could have got a better job if he had achieved higher qualifications.

## Paul

Paul was referred to the NHP because he was underachieving in school although he was not identified as having learning difficulties. He wanted to come to college because he thought he would get on a construction course after finishing his GCSEs. He stated that,

‘I didn’t enjoy school, I found it boring and I always got in trouble because I didn’t want to do my work. I found work in school hard and I didn’t get a lot of help from my teachers. I preferred doing practical things though I was working in practical lessons.’

He said that his mum was also concerned with his progress in school and wanted him to come to college because she was told in school that he would get more help in college. She wanted him to achieve his qualifications and get a good job, something she was not able to do because she did not have any qualifications. Paul stated that work in English and Maths in college was still hard but he was getting more help from the teachers and LSAs. There were no issues with Paul’s attendance nor behaviour on the NHP. He enjoyed coming to college because he liked doing subjects in construction although he stated that one afternoon of week in construction was not enough and there needed to be more subjects and classes in construction.

Although he did not achieve good grades in academic subjects, he was accepted onto the construction course which he successfully completed and stayed on in college for a further two years. He is now working in construction but said that he would like to do an apprenticeship but his poor literacy and numeracy skills were a problem.

## John

John was excluded from school because of involvement in fights and bullying other pupils. He was described as experiencing SEBD and having difficulties in writing but was not tested for dyslexia. His academic ability was nevertheless high. He said that he did not particularly want to come to college but he did not have any other choice,

‘They just told me and my mum that I wasn’t allowed to come back to school and had to go to college instead. I wasn’t happy about it because all my friends stayed in school and did their GCSEs. My mum wasn’t happy either because she didn’t want me to get involved with some kids from my school who were already in college.’

He stated that teachers did not like him at school because they thought he was a bully,

‘I never hurt anybody unless they started on me but teachers never believed me – I was always the one to get blamed.’

He worked well in classes and was happy when he came to college. He also stated that his attitude at home improved too and he was not arguing with his mother and step-father as much as he used to when he was in school. They also recognised that he had matured while attending college, and were hoping that he would get onto another course or apprenticeship after completing the NHP.

He was not involved in serious incidents nor fighting while attending the NHP although there were some incidents of bullying other students. However, John always showed a willingness to talk to other students and resolve problems with them.

He achieved good grades in his functional skills exams although he wanted to do GCSEs because all of his friends from school had done them. He enrolled on another course after completing the NHP but dropped out after the first term because he wanted to join the army. He then changed his mind and said he would like to go back to college in the following academic year to finish the course he started. At the time I interviewed him, he was looking for a job.

Andrew

Andrew was excluded from school for fighting and bullying other pupils. He was described as experiencing SEBD and having learning difficulties. His attendance at

school was not very good. He also had a criminal record (theft and robbery) and was on a 'tag' when he joined the NHP.

'I hated school, I didn't want to do my work because it was boring. I only attended school because my mum made me. And then there was this group of kids I hanged about with, they were always getting in trouble so teachers thought it was me who was naughty.'

Andrew found work in classes difficult and often misbehaved and interrupted other students in college. In meetings, his mother expressed concerns about the group of peers that he associated with outside of college. He openly admitted smoking cannabis when he was out in his free time which his mother did not approve of but said she could not control him when he was out. For this, he was referred to drug counselling by his form tutor and with his mother's approval.

Although he claimed that he preferred practical work, Andrew did not work well in practical lessons either stating that they were boring or that 'teachers were too serious' and 'didn't know how to have a laugh'.

Andrew's attendance was not very good on the NHP and meetings were often held with him and his mother due to his poor attendance, behaviour and attitude towards work.

He completed his exams on the NHP but achieved low grades. After completing the NHP, he did not want to stay in college but wanted to get a job. At the time of the interview he was not in education, employment or training (NEET). He stated that his key worker from the Youth Offending Service (YOS) was helping him to find an apprentice course.

However, he added that,

'I wish I did better in college, maybe I would have a job now. I realise now that people (teachers on the NHP) wanted to help me but I wasn't very mature then like I'm now.'

## **REASONS FOR EXCLUSION**

The young people were asked about their experiences at school and reasons for their referral to the NHP to gain their views on why the mainstream school system had not worked out for them and what they thought contributed to their disaffection within the mainstream education system. All these young people recognised that their behaviour in school was unacceptable but most of them seemed to blame the others, such as their peers getting them in trouble or teachers being unfair in dealing with the problems they experienced. Some noted that the work they were given in school was not interesting or was too difficult for some of them. They described their behaviour in school giving examples and commenting on the appropriateness of it and the way discipline was exercised in schools. They described school as too strict and teachers as not showing sufficient interest in them and their problems and not offering enough support. They also did not see the relevance of the work they were doing, in particular academic subjects, for what they wanted to do in terms of their future career.

In order to examine other micro- and meso-systems such as peers and family circumstances which may have contributed to their disaffection, the interviewees were also asked whether there were any important events other than difficulties in their school life that might have had an impact on their behaviour and loss of interest in school. Two of the young people noted the influence of peers who were not attending school, several reported having problems at home and one identified the long absence in school due to medical reasons. These reasons indicated that there were indeed other factors that were in operation other than school factors which could have had an impact on their behaviour and disaffection. Bronfenbrenner referred to these factors in relation to the chrono-system which ‘encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives.’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1994: 40). The changes which occur in the characteristics of the young person can be attributed and explained by the developmental stage through which young people pass in their adolescent years when the transition from childhood into adulthood occurs. This was evident in the responses from young people who suddenly lost interest in school, experienced problems at home and reported the importance of their peer group. The other changes which occur in the environment in which the young person lives refer to family circumstances or

changes in family structure; changes in other micro-or meso-systems such as exclusion from school; association with deviant peers; socioeconomic background including the employment status of parents/carers; and any other significant events that occur in everyday life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

## **PERCEPTIONS OF EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL AND COLLEGE**

The young people's views on their college experiences compared with school were examined and they spoke a lot about perceived differences between school and college, as a consequence. They made clear distinctions between the two educational institutions. Most young people expressed the view that school was treating them like children and teachers did not give them chance to voice their opinions when it came to experiencing problems at school. Contrary to school, college was an adult environment and it treated students as adults whereby their views were valued and listened to by the members of the teaching team.

'I like college because they treat you like an adult. In school the teachers talk to you like you're a kid who doesn't understand anything.'

Peter

'I wanted to come to college because I wanted to do practical things. I think this is why I enjoyed college more than school.'

Richard

'I liked college more than school because students acted more mature in college. In college there weren't any silly kids who try to get you in trouble.'

Stephanie

'I enjoyed the construction lessons the most in college. I found it difficult to concentrate in other classes, they were like in school but the reports I got from

construction lecturers were always very positive, they said I did good work in them lessons.’

Paul

‘I didn’t choose to come to college but I enjoyed college and got on with most students on the NHP, not really getting in trouble much. Maybe because they (teachers) treated us and spoke to us like we was adults.’

John

‘I don’t think college was very different than school – you still had to do boring work. I wanted to do construction in college but I didn’t like teachers there – they were strict like in school. I also had meetings like in school if I didn’t attend or do my work.’

Andrew

They also saw school as formal and compulsory whereas college was informal and voluntary despite the fact that their attendance and punctuality were closely monitored in college too.

As a result, all the young people who were interviewed except one preferred attending college to school. One of the main reasons given for this preference was the relationships with teachers. They expressed views that teachers in college were more supportive, willing to understand and listen to students’ problems and more helpful when it came to managing work in classes. Some considered that the teachers in college dealt with problem behaviour better than teachers at school.

‘Teachers on the NHP didn’t nag you for silly little things like your uniform or not having the equipment but they spoke to you like an adult and explain things to you. If you were late, they would give you these late slips, which I think is rubbish – it doesn’t make you come in on time. What makes you come in on time is the respect you give them because they help you.’

Peter



‘In college I get help from my teachers and they try to explain things if you don’t understand them. In school the teachers didn’t help me.’

Frank

‘Some students misbehaved but the teachers in college were more understanding with behaviour of students than teachers in school.’

Stephanie

‘When I came to college, I started acting more mature. I started listening to the teachers because they really wanted to help you.’

Sylvie

‘Teachers in college staff dealt better with behaviour than teachers in school. They weren’t that strict so I got into less trouble. They talk to you like you’re an adult, they don’t look down on you.’

William

‘The work in English and maths was the same in college and I really didn’t like it but teachers were more helpful and supportive than in school.’

Paul

‘I could talk to my teachers about my parents and they helped me to understand my parents and become closer to them. They were happier with me then when I was in school.’

John

‘I liked some teachers on the NHP who helped me.’

Andrew

The young people described their experiences at school as not enjoyable and having a negative impact on their relationship with their parents. Some thought that their positive engagement in college also positively impacted on these relationships at

home. This shows the importance of communication and collaboration with parents/carers whose children experience SEBD as well as effective relationships between different systems.

‘My parents were much happier with me when I started to go to college. The teachers called them when I did good work and I got certificates for good behaviour, work and attendance. This made my parents very happy. I was happy too, I don’t think that would have happened in school.’

Sylvie

‘When I started college, I didn’t have many arguments at home with my mum and my step-dad. Before I argued with them all the time. They said that I matured since I started college.’

John

‘They always called my mum when I wasn’t in college or if I was naughty, just like in school. And we had meetings with my teachers and my mum. Now I know they wanted to help but then I didn’t understand.’

Andrew

‘My dad was seriously depressed because mum left him. Then it was problems with me at school. When I came to college, I talked to one of my teachers about it – I think this helped me to understand what my dad went through so I knuckled down in college to make him happy. He didn’t like school teachers but he appreciated what teachers in college did for me.’

Richard

## **CURRICULUM**

Most young people spoke about the academic subjects that they studied in school as boring and having no direct relevance to the world of work and thus useless for gaining employability skills. In contrast to academic subjects, they reasoned that

vocational subjects that were more practical and offered hands-on experience in different vocational areas were beneficial for their future choice of careers and getting jobs. A majority of young people interviewed stated that this was the main cause of their disaffection with education in mainstream school.

However, when asked about the subjects studied at the college compared to school, there were mixed views on the curriculum that was offered on the NHP. Most students expressed interest in practical subjects whereas some were interested in doing more academic subjects alongside vocational subjects.

‘I liked college work because we didn’t do many academic subjects but a lot of English and Maths, which is what you needed to get on another course in college. We had these tasters in construction and I enjoyed these the most but the teachers weren’t as good there as on the NHP. But I didn’t really care because I was doing what I liked and learning new skills for the job I wanted to do in future.’

Peter

‘I was not interested in many subjects in school and wanted to do more practical things which would get me job in the future. That’s why I liked college. In school I felt I was thick because work was hard but in college I can do work because I get help.’

Frank

‘I liked the course but I wanted to do more GCSEs, we only did three and in school you do eight or more.’

Stephanie

‘I think the subjects we were studying were good, I didn’t need a lot of GCSEs to do a course I wanted to do after (the completion of NHP) in college. I got good qualifications and my course I am doing.’

Sylvie

‘I wanted to stay at school and do my GCSEs, maybe I would be still in college if I got to do them. I only did three (GCSEs) in college and I got good grades in them so it’s good, if I want to come back to college, I can still do another course.’

William

‘I only got to do one afternoon in construction which wasn’t enough, I wanted to do more practical courses. But it’s OK, I got good qualifications and I did more courses in construction after (the completion of NHP).

Paul

## **PEDAGOGY**

The young people (e.g. Peter) stated that being in smaller classes, having a teacher and a learning support assistant in each class meant they were getting more help from tutors and learning support staff. They thought that this was more beneficial because they could ask for help and complete their work on time. Most of them found work easier to manage and lessons more interesting than in school. They enjoyed practical lessons because they saw their relevance to future work for which they were preparing. All the young people reported not being interested in academic work and wanting to do more practical work although two were interested in academic work as well. They found the approach to teaching different in college to school and noted the benefits of continuous assessment in class as opposed to end-of-year examinations. However, the achievement rates examined from the college database in documentary evidence analysis showed that the achievement is equally good and above national averages in BTEC and GCSE qualifications. They reported the benefits of what could be termed ‘teaching strategies’ in classes stating that

‘I liked doing work in class in BTEC, I didn’t like doing exams in the big hall – it was too stressful although teachers were nice. Everything seemed better in college – classes were smaller, you got help with your work and work was interesting – you know in English we got to do lyrics of my favourite songs and in maths we got to count the cars in the car park.’

Stewart

‘Teachers in college made work more interesting, it wasn’t dull like in school and it was easier because you got help from teachers and LSAs’.

Frank

‘They (teachers) never asked us in school what work we liked but in college we could choose what we liked doing – this helped a lot because it’s easier to do work you are interested in.’

Stephanie

‘It was very easy in college because we didn’t do lot of GCSEs, less stress and work in BTEC was very interesting. I guess the kids who needed help found it better. Teachers were also more relaxed, they gave you more chances than I got in school.’

William

## **DISCIPLINE**

From an examination of the differences in discipline, rules and punishment in school and college, it emerged that this was also linked to the notion of being treated like an adult, having more freedom and having to take responsibility for their own actions. The young people thought that the strict discipline in school did not allow any freedom or autonomy to be exercised by the young people whereas the greater autonomy and freedom they experienced in college placed more responsibility on the young people which resulted in a more mature response from them. The favourite example given by the young people was the use of mobile phones. In school, the young people were not allowed to bring mobile phones whereas in college they could

bring phones in, but were not allowed to use them during lesson times, although they were free to use them in break times. They also talked about having little choice in activities in the classroom and some described this as one of the reasons for being punished or getting into trouble e.g. refusal to do certain activities that they did not enjoy such as role-plays and reading out loud in the class. The young people also reported that this exercise of freedom and autonomy was also reflected in the relationships between the students and the teachers. In school, the teachers were giving orders and the pupils were expected to listen to them without questioning them, be it about the activities in the class or rules. In college, the teachers consulted students about the choice of activities and discussed and negotiated rules within the class at the beginning of the year.

Although poor behaviour was also punished in college, the young people thought that the disciplinary procedure in college was fair because it allowed them to have their voice heard which was not the case in school. They also thought that exclusion from college would have a longer-term consequence such as not being able to enrol on a course they wanted to take in the following academic year. In addition to this, they perceived college as their second chance and wanted to gain qualifications to pursue their desired careers.

When asked about the behaviour of students on the NHP, they indicated that although there were many students who were 'naughty' in classes at the beginning, the NHP staff was very good in dealing with their behaviour in that,

'They (teachers and LSAs) wouldn't make a big thing out of it. They would speak to students, sometimes outside of class and let them cool down before they came back in class. I think this was good because some kids were immature and needed to be explained what they were doing wrong. This was good because they (teachers and LSAs) always listened to you and tried to understand you. If you were really naughty, they would call your parents and talked to them as well. But I liked when they called my mum when I was good, this had never happened at school, teachers in school only called my mum when I was naughty so I thought what's the point.'

Peter

‘In college you’d still get in trouble if you were naughty but it wasn’t strict like in school. In school you get exclusion for being naughty, in college they talked to you like you’re an adult.’

Stewart

‘If I was naughty they (teachers) called my mum and got disciplined few times like I had verbal and written warnings but they were nicer about it, they talked to you like you’re a grown-up.’

Frank

‘Some kids always got in trouble in college but they weren’t excluded. In school they wanted to get rid of you if you didn’t listen.’

Richard

‘Some teachers in college were too nice with naughty kids, they got away with a lot. That wouldn’t happen in school. Sometimes it was too noisy in classes and teachers didn’t do anything.’

Stephanie

‘I got in trouble many times in college but I stayed. I would have got excluded if I was in school.’

Andrew

## **PASTORAL CARE**

Throughout the interviews with the young people, it was evident that they valued the support that they had received from the NHP staff. They felt that the staff were interested in their lives and wanted the young people to succeed,

‘I got in trouble more at the beginning of the course. Then I realised that it wasn’t like school. Teachers were nice even when I misbehaved, they were very patient with us and little things didn’t bother them. Like if you didn’t have a pen or something, you’d get in trouble in school.’

‘I think that teachers helped me a lot with my behaviour, in school I just got shouted at, then I used to argue back and got in trouble. I didn’t get as well with all teachers but they were all good teachers. They helped me to enroll on the course I wanted to do.’

‘Teachers on the NHP always had time for students. I could talk to them and trust them.’

Richard

‘The teachers on the NHP helped me to get on the course I wanted to do. They helped me to get the qualifications and if I stayed in school I would have ended up without any qualifications and doing nothing.’

‘I had a lot of problems at home with my parents. Teachers helped me to get on with my parents because they called my parents to say I was doing good work.’

Sylvie

Peter described positively his experience of education on the NHP,

‘The NHP was good, it helped a lot of kids to get courses they wanted and also with their behaviour. The teachers respected the students and wanted to help them.’

Stewart thought that attending the college helped him to improve his behaviour,

‘The staff on the NHP was great, especially learning support, they spoke to me like an adult. I enjoyed my lessons better than in school. The college was very different to school, it wasn’t that strict, they (teachers) didn’t pick on little things like uniform.’



‘I didn’t get in trouble in college because I liked doing work and I got help from teachers.’

Richard

Staff views expressed in group discussions also indicated that the pastoral care was considered very important in catering for students who experience SEBD.

### THE NHP: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Students identified the main strengths of the NHP as the support they received from staff, being treated like an adult and the fact that the qualifications they gained on the NHP helped them to enrol on post-16 courses. Most of the students identified that their attendance, behaviour and attitude towards education had improved as a result of attending the NHP. The majority of the students noted that they achieved higher grades in their exams than they had been predicted in school. Some identified that their relationship with their parents improved too as a result of their good progress on the NHP. Some students mentioned that getting certificates for good attendance, behaviour and work, as well as the communication and acknowledgement of good outcomes they achieved on the NHP, helped in motivating them. Others reported that coming to college made them more mature because of its adult environment. Some stated that having more freedom and autonomy made them more responsible and helped them to mature.

Students’ views on the curriculum varied. Some thought that it was good because there were more practical lessons than academic lessons, while others saw this as a disadvantage. The students who preferred the curriculum on the NHP were generally identified in their referral forms as having lower academic ability than those who expressed a preference for more academic subjects to be introduced on the NHP. However, they all agreed that the qualifications they achieved helped in their progression post-16.

The majority of the students enjoyed the practical lessons they were doing in college although some thought that there needed to be more hours allocated to these lessons.

Students' views on the rules and discipline on the NHP also varied. Some thought that the more relaxed approach to discipline in comparison with the mainstream schools they came from produced better outcomes because they observed that strict rules in schools caused more problems with students. The others thought that some teachers were not able to control students' behaviour which had a negative impact on their learning. It is interesting to note that this was expressed by the two students from the 2009/10 or 2010/11 cohort, the academic years that were also identified as problematic in terms of staff recruitment and approaches to discipline in group discussions and student questionnaires.

Apart from the approach to discipline, the other weaknesses of the NHP identified by the students were the accommodation and teaching resources when compared to mainstream school. They noted that the learning environment and equipment were better in the vocational areas of college than those on the NHP.

These weaknesses were also identified as the main areas for improvement. In addition to this, students considered that there needed to be more educational trips and visits.

## **DISCUSSION**

The theoretical approach adopted in this thesis has its basis in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which requires the examination of different systems that influence the development of an individual. This study set out to examine the NHP in its natural setting, as an important part of micro-systems as well as meso-systems which relate to relationships amongst these different systems and an individual. In this chapter these micro- and meso- systems and their interrelationships were explored in the young people's stories to depict their perspectives on these systems. The young people's characteristics and their life circumstances emerged from their own stories of the reasons for their disaffection. Their stories and discussions in the interviews confirmed the ecological systems theory by indicating that there were other factors

other than just educational and school factors that needed to be considered in studying the causes of disaffection and the approaches to education of children and young people who experience SEBD, such as family circumstances, relationship with peers and personal characteristics. In terms of the education system, these findings have important implications for the curriculum, pedagogy, discipline and pastoral care adopted in different educational institutions whether these be mainstream schools or alternative educational provisions. As in group discussion 2 and the student questionnaires, pastoral care emerged as an important theme which enhanced students' progression in terms of their behaviour and achievement. This confirms the ecological theoretical approach of having supportive micro- and meso-systems. Students' views on improvement in their relationship with parents also affirmed the importance of communication and collaboration amongst different systems and the positive impact of these meso-systems in their development.

In regards to the NHP, the findings showed that although a great majority of students experienced good education while on the NHP and enjoyed being in the adult environment of college and progressed to courses post-16, the retention rates on these courses were not satisfactory. An important support offered on the NHP by the careers service was seen by the staff in group discussion 2 as beneficial to informing the young people about future careers and qualifications they needed to gain to make successful progression towards their future goals. This support was not adequate in academic years 2010/11 and 2011/12. In these academic years the follow-up interviews were not conducted by the career advisors and this might have had a negative impact on students' choices in terms of further progression in education, training or employment.

## CHAPTER 8 - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH THE NHP'S HEADS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two NHP heads, both with considerable hands-on experience in teaching 14-16 year olds in a college or a mainstream school context, as well as responsibility for organizing courses for this cohort and school liaison. To preserve their anonymity, they are referred to consistently as Head 1 and Head 2, and as male (although this is not necessarily their gender).

I constructed the topic guide prior to conducting the interviews with a view 'to capture the aims and objectives of the research' (Bauer and Gaskell, 2002, p.40) and to raise issues posed by the relevant research questions. Namely, to investigate the NHP's heads views on the programme's strengths and weaknesses and to identify areas for its improvement. This also meant combining both the findings from literature reviews in Chapters 1 and 2 and the themes that emerged from the field research in Chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7. These topics were introduced at the beginning of each interview, following the explanation of the intended aims of this study to the heads. Ethical considerations were also discussed with the interviewees and these included issues of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation in the study. The conversational style of interview was adopted in order to allow heads to express their views on the topics, the meanings they attached to the identified features of the NHP but also to raise any other issues not covered by the topics which they considered important to explore for the purposes of this study.

The aim of this type of interview 'is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective' (Patton, 1990: 278). 'At the root of ...interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman, 1991: 4). The interviewer allows interviewees to 'speak their minds' (Denscombe, 1998: 113) by 'introducing a theme or topic and then letting the interviewee develop his or her ideas'. In this study developing an understanding of the programme management perspectives on issues such as educational inclusion, alternative curriculum and pedagogy, pastoral care and support for young people with behaviour concerns is crucial to understanding how the programme staff and management work collaboratively with LA services and local schools. Gaining that

level of understanding involves the interviewer being able to gain an insight into the interviewees' perspective. Seidman (1991: 4) explains that an 'assumption in interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience'. The semi-structured interview enables the study to probe interviewees regarding the themes which emerged through the examination of documentary evidence, during group discussions with the programme staff and the responses from students' questionnaire.

The initial data analysis involved transcribing taped interviews and then using the key themes to organize the data. This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts and cutting and pasting text into a data matrix under each category. This process reduced the data which enabled its coding and the development of emerging themes (Flick, 2002: 180; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Interview data were displayed under the emergent themes. The themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews were first compared within this method and then with the themes emerging from other methods of data collection conducted during the field research. Finally these themes were linked to themes that emerged from literature reviews.

## BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

Head 1 was an FE teacher with considerable experience of working with both disaffected as well as the mainstream students on vocational courses.

'I have been teaching in the FE sector for over 20 years, starting on mainstream post-16 vocational courses then gradually moving to work with disengaged 14-16 year olds. I enjoyed the pastoral care side to it. At one point I was named a surrogate father to those students who were in care. That meant something, there was a great responsibility attached to working with this cohort. You're not only a teacher to them but you found yourself as taking on a role of a parent.'

(Head 1)

Head 2 started working on the NHP as an agency teacher and his background was secondary education. Although he had experience of working with the 14-16 cohort in mainstream schools, he stated,

‘I was used to teaching what are considered to be good kids, you know, kids that end up going to Cambridge and Oxford Universities and this was a completely new experience to me. As I grew up in a similar background to them (students) my schooling was not that different to theirs, I realised that humour I was using helped me to interact and connect with them and that I had skills to work with this cohort. You had to be able to put yourself in their shoes to understand their behaviour. This is what subsequently made me apply for the position of the head’.

(Head 2)

Head 1 set up the NHP and as such was privy to conversations and the devising of the Collaboration Agreement (CA) with the Head of Children’s Services for the Borough as well as the heads of local schools and the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) as referral agencies. He stated that he built a good working relationship with the heads in the local educational institutions as well as with the LA. He considered this relationship and collaboration with different external agencies crucial in addressing the needs of young people who were not engaging in mainstream education.

In stating the purpose of setting up the NHP in the first place, Head 1 responded that the number of young people in the borough who were excluded from mainstream schools due to behavioural problems was significant as was the number of young people who were not in education, training and employment (NEET) in the 16-19 age group and there was a need to develop an alternative educational provision for this cohort. He was also in charge of the Work-Related Learning programmes (WRL) for 14-16 year olds. These programmes catered for some 150 students in different vocational areas but was different to the NHP since students on WRL were still attending mainstream schools and only attended college three days a week.

‘The college was in a good position to offer a variety of vocational courses for the cohort who challenged the educational system and who were at risk of

dropping out. We started off with only one group of 15 students on the NHP but within two years this number grew to 250 students, 80 of which were on the NHP and the rest on WRL. At the start the budget was £40K and within four years it increased to £1.2 million. This meant that we could invest further and offer a sound educational provision which catered for students' needs in an efficient manner. The two neighbouring boroughs also referred their students to us – some boroughs did not want these students.'

(Head 1)

## FE CONTEXT

### The description of the heads' backgrounds

Both heads viewed college as a having a positive impact on the progress of young people due to its expertise in vocational subjects and facilities it offered to its students. They indicated that the adult environment of college was more suitable to young people who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). The NHP staff encouraged them to act like adults because they treated them like adults. However, this was not the case with the staff in other areas of college and at the beginning they experienced difficulties in organising taster courses in vocational areas because some teachers were not prepared to teach these young people although this changed in subsequent years. They emphasised the importance of the Senior Management Team (SMT) in college in promoting and raising the profile of these young people within college. The heads also addressed the training needs for staff who were involved in educating young people, including the health and safety aspects and child protection issues. They also considered the importance of their collaboration with the external agencies and students' parents/carers in addressing these issues alongside the services offered in college. Head 1 indicated that the practices and processes which were employed on the NHP and his role were very different to other colleagues in college who were Heads in different areas.

'This (the NHP) was always very different to other areas because I had to attend to college policies as well as to policies that operated in mainstream schools. For example, I had to employ an attendance officer, there was

extensive work with parents, social services, educational psychology service etc. Some of the finance came from the LA and some from college so I was answerable to both the LA bosses and my bosses in college. The NHP was more risky than other courses because the student drop-out was sometimes quite high which affected our success rates although students' achievement rate was high.'

They stated that the SMT had a crucial role in helping them to implement and develop the NHP. The SMT considered their views on the curriculum offered on the NHP and processes which needed to be employed on it. Head 2 identified that he had an interim line manager for a short period of time who was not experienced in this area and was able to detect the negative effect that this had had on staff motivation and discipline on the NHP,

'The approach of my interim line manager to disciplining students was very different, he was not teaching the students on the NHP and did not understand the benefits of the whole-school approach to discipline. He wanted to have sole responsibility in disciplining students and the staff on the NHP felt that their authority with students was undermined and that it sent mixed messages to students.'

## COLLABORATION AND AUTONOMY

The theme of collaboration with different agencies in the context of young people who experience SEBD runs through the literature review on AEPs, successive governments' policy initiatives as well as findings in group discussions and documentary evidence in this study. The heads also indicated that their role required exercise of a certain amount of autonomy in relation to the implementation of the NHP and day-to-day running of it in the FE context.

Head 1 explained that his role was autonomous in the sense that he was in charge of the recruitment and discipline of the students although he was answerable to the Local Authority's Quality Assurance Manager (QAM) with whom he worked closely on



these issues. He saw it as a co-ordinated approach across the borough. He stated that the LA provided additional support through ‘all wrap-around services’ - the Educational Psychology Service, Connexions and Youth Workers, who worked closely with him, and the NHP staff. All these services were offered to the NHP as a part of the Collaboration Agreement (CA).

Head 2 described how the NHP operated like a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in the sense that it provided full-time education for its students, the support it received from the LA in terms of educational psychology service support, careers advice and what he thought was unique on the NHP – the input of the local Youth Services. He also mentioned that he had to report any serious discipline or attendance concerns to the QAM whom he also had to consult in making any decisions in regards to young people’s future on the NHP. But he added that dealing with day-to-day issues such as discipline needed to be enforced by all the staff, teachers and LSAs – considering that this whole-school approach to discipline was the only way to effectively deal with disciplining students when the cohort comprised 45 or so students mainly all excluded from schools due to behavioural problems. He also stated that at the time he joined the NHP (this was during the first stage of the NHP implementation from 2004/5 to 2008/9), the NHP had a lot of support from the LA, including free training for teachers and LSAs in child protection, health and safety, behaviour management and motivational techniques. But indicated that this all changed with the Coalition government’s cuts in funding which introduced ‘buying’ all these services.

## THE CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

Both heads identified curriculum and pedagogy adopted to deliver this programme as one of the most important features of the NHP in re-engaging young people in education and helping them to progress to further education, training or/and employment in their post-compulsory years.

Head 1 emphasised the importance of offering GCSEs in core subjects as prescribed by the National Curriculum for Key Stage 4 (KS4). He thought that this was important to students because they were still in compulsory education and these

subjects were offered in mainstream schools so it had a positive impact on their motivation. The vocational options were initially offered as tasters with no qualifications attached to them. He thought that many students at that time did not see the value in studying these subjects because they did not get recognised qualifications for them. This changed in subsequent years when qualifications were attached to vocational subjects because it enabled students to study chosen options on higher levels once they enrolled on courses in further education, following the completion of the NHP. In terms of pedagogy used in delivering the curriculum, he stated that,

‘To make it more manageable and achievable for students, the work was broken down into what I term ‘bite size chunks’ and assessed through continuous assessment which was based on the work in classes. This was because many of these youngsters missed a lot of their schooling due to non attendance and numerous exclusions. Individualisation and target setting was essential in this process so that they (students) could see where they were going and how they were progressing and this acted as a motivator for them.’

(Head 1)

Head 2 also identified that the curriculum offered to these young people needed to include the core curriculum that was offered in mainstream schools,

‘There were a lot of capable students who were on the NHP and offering GCSEs to them meant that they were kept on task and had a goal to achieve. Parents and referral agencies thought the same. After all GCSEs were still a common currency, the only qualification they knew (the students) and were interested in doing.’

He stated that this might sound contradictory because the same students were not motivated to do these subjects at school but he thought that smaller class sizes, different pedagogy which was student-centred and based on individualisation, the support of teachers and LSAs made their work manageable and produced positive outcomes for them when compared to mainstream schools. He added that,

‘It was a difficult and stressful task though to prepare them for the GCSE exams since they were with us only for one academic year. I always supported the idea that they should come on the NHP in Year 10 and the achievement would have been much better although we always had pass rates which were higher than national averages in these subjects. I saw a difference in students’ motivation when we stopped doing GCSEs, they were not interested in doing Entry level qualifications nor Functional Skills’.

He considered that students who did not do so well (on their vocational courses) were not really interested in vocational courses but were told by schools that they ‘were not academic and should do vocational courses’. For this reason he thought that there should be a mixture of academic and vocational courses on the NHP because college was a different environment than mainstream school. His view was that academic subjects challenged them, opened their horizons.

‘I often saw students who were coming to us very disengaged but with a different approach to pedagogy and discipline, they managed to do well in the exams. They were acting out scenes from ‘The Merchant of Venice’ and saying they could not have imagined doing that at school’.

He noted that BTEC courses which were offered in different subjects were very successful because they entailed continuous assessment in class in a form of a portfolio of evidence rather than an end-of-year exam as a summative assessment. Head 2 also concluded from his own experience of teaching in mainstream schools and on the NHP that offering well recognised qualifications in a variety of subjects, which were also offered in mainstream schools and thus valued by students and their parents, was what the curriculum in alternative educational provision needed to implement because it proved successful in re-engaging disaffected students. Referring to his experience of teaching in mainstream schools, he identified that he was attracted to apply for a job on the NHP because he realised that he could use differentiation effectively which meant that he could engage all the students in class in the process of learning. He added that this (pedagogy) was what was done well on the NHP.

Head 2 considered that the extra-curricular activities such as sports, careers, PHSE that was delivered by the Youth Service were also beneficial for raising students' self-esteem and confidence.

## QUALITY

The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that there were concerns about the quality of education that was offered in alternative educational provisions. The examination of documentary evidence in this study described how the quality assurance was implemented and monitored by the college management as well as by the LA.

Head 1 commented that the NHP was inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in the second year of its implementation and it was graded as 'Good'. He described the provision as sound and serving the local community needs. He also identified the importance of the LA in overseeing the quality of provision and setting the targets for students' retention, achievement and progression which needed to be achieved.

Head 2 commented on changes in government policy as having a direct impact on different aspects of the NHP,

'The LA set the targets and conducted quality checks including teaching and learning as well as health and safety. However, with the changes in the LA and school funding, the role of the LA on the NHP changed since the QAM was not directly involved on the NHP. This had an impact on the curriculum we then delivered although not on the overall quality of provision since annual checks were still undertaken by the LA. It made it difficult though to access all the services that young people required because we needed to pay from them.'

(Head 2)

Both heads identified that the programme evaluations in the form of course reviews contributed to the development and improvement of various aspects of the NHP. They stressed the importance of a whole-staff input in devising these reviews and voicing their opinions on the NHP's strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement. Regular lesson observations which were conducted on the NHP were seen by heads as

necessary to ensuring the quality of teaching and learning and to identify any training needs of teachers and LSAs. Head 2 noted the importance of peer observations conducted amongst teaching staff on the NHP and team teaching for developing teaching staff skills and ensuring their continuous professional development (CPD). Although he admitted that this was difficult to implement due to financial and time constraints, he expressed the view that these strategies were valuable in keeping the teaching staff motivated and contributed to building the stronger team.

## STAFFING AND PASTORAL CARE

These two themes emerged not only through the literature review on the research on AEPs but were also identified in the examination of documentary evidence, group discussions, students' questionnaire responses and the analysis of semi-structured interviews with students as one of the most important aspects of engaging students and enhancing their overall progress.

‘Staff recruitment was always a difficult part of my job, there were not a lot of teachers who were willing to teach these kids. I was lucky in that I had an excellent team of people who worked with me for a long time. I never thought though that experience was that important, it was rather willingness to put yourself in these students' situation and compassion you offered to them. I do think that having a strong and committed team is crucial in succeeding as is the management approach you adopt with your team. You have to be flexible and recognise the hard task they (staff) have teaching disengaged students.’

(Head 1)

Head 2 identified that the vocational courses were delivered by mainstream lecturers in different vocational areas of college and students' engagement in these subjects depended on whether these lecturers were able to cater for their individual needs. He stated that good classroom management skills were very important in dealing with this cohort. He noted that there was also a problem in communication with some lecturers in that he would find out about problems in these lessons when students were already underachieving. However, he indicated that a significant number of students

who did well in their vocational courses and established good relationships with lecturers who were teaching them secured places on these courses in the following academic year and flourished.

He described the NHP staff in the following words,

‘There was also a strong team on the NHP that was able to pull together at the time of struggle and was committed to help the students. That was their common goal and students knew this. This is why we were successful, they (students) felt there was always at least one person they could speak to. It was hard finding good teaching staff though. I always thought that if you are genuinely interested in helping this type of students, you will do well with them.’

(Head 2)

The heads discussed the importance of providing effective pastoral care to students which they described in the following words,

‘These young people needed a lot more support than you would be required to undertake if you were teaching in mainstream. We had to address their social, emotional and behavioural needs before they were able to engage in learning. We put in place mentoring scheme whereby one-to-one support (to students) was offered by staff to overcome these barriers to learning. The focus was on their positive attributes and setting SMART targets for them and then working together on achieving these.’

Head 1

‘We had a difficult task in that we had to make sure that first students attended and then once they were there to engage them in learning. The staff attitude was very important, there was a lot of communication with the parents/carers of young people not only when problems arised but also to inform them about their child progress. Then there was communication with other agencies that

were involved with individual students. This required a lot of staff's time, the work extended beyond the classroom.'

Head 2

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Although the themes that emerged from the interviews with the NHP's heads were to some degree different from those that arose from interviews with the young people and the NHP staff, due to their different perspectives, many themes recurred. The main areas the heads identified in relation to their role were:

- i) Their background and experience
- ii) The college environment and the relevance of it to the NHP cohort with the reference to curriculum, pedagogy and discipline
- iii) The role of and collaboration with the LA and other external agencies on the NHP and financial implications
- iv) The staff within the college including the staff employed on the NHP and their involvement in and attitudes to working with this cohort
- v) The importance of quality assurance and regular checks on teaching and learning

The experience and background that were described by the heads were very different, one was an FE lecturer and the other had more secondary school experience. They were also employed on the NHP at different stages of its implementation, one set it up and the other joined it when it was already well established. However, their views on the important features of the NHP and its benefits for students were very similar, although they never worked together. Head 1 was employed on the programme as a manager and never undertook any teaching other than covering lessons in the absence of class teachers. Head 2 was first employed as an agency teacher, then became a

permanent member of teaching staff and finally was recruited as a manager. Thus, they placed emphasis on different aspects of the NHP. However, they both identified that their job role was very different when compared to working with students in mainstream both in college and school. The differences were in the approach to pedagogy that was adopted to teach students and skills that were needed to work with the young people who experience SEBD. They both indicated that their role was more than just being a teacher and/or head, there was considerable work in terms of pastoral care offered to these students and collaboration with external agencies in the borough and parents as well as working with the other staff in college who was involved in the education of young people through the delivery of vocational tasters.

They also mentioned that the college was under less pressure than schools in regards to achievement in GCSEs, there was more emphasis on the success rates and thus on the retention rates. Head 2 indicated how changes in government policies in terms of the curriculum were evident in the academic years when GCSEs were not offered and the negative impact of abolition of GCSEs on students' engagement in learning and thus on the management of discipline. As a result of these changes in curriculum offered on the NHP, schools started sending students who had special learning needs rather than the more able who could attempt GCSEs since these students did not want to come to college unless GCSEs were offered – this was also identified in the students' questionnaires and interviews with students.

They both described the FE college context as different to mainstream schools because of its adult environment, the opportunities it had to offer to its students in terms of a vocational curriculum and the approach to rules and discipline that was more relaxed than in mainstream schools and based on young people taking responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. This was also more in line with theories on adult education which are outlined and discussed in the final discussion in this thesis. The heads were critical of the attitude of some staff in college who were not interested in teaching this cohort and identified the need for staff training in relevant areas. Head 1 discussed the need for a co-ordinated approach in implementing the NHP within the college setting. They both indicated that the SMT in college played an important role in the implementation and development of the NHP. Head 2 also highlighted the importance of having middle managers who were



knowledgeable and experienced in dealing with students with SEBD and in making day-to-day decisions particularly in relation to disciplining students. The role of SMT and middle management was closely linked to the themes of collaboration and autonomy. The heads felt that given the differences in their role when compared to the roles of heads in the other areas of college, exercising autonomy was very important because of the dual role they played – they had to comply with the requirements set out in the CA for the 14-16 cohort and these needed to be matched with the college policies and procedures. Thus, they had to possess knowledge not only related to post-compulsory education and policies but also to the compulsory school curriculum and policies in which other college management, including the SMT, did not have sufficient expertise. They also indicated that this was one of the main reasons why the collaboration between different agencies needed to be maintained, including the role of the LA on the NHP.

In discussion about the curriculum and pedagogy implemented on the NHP, both heads indicated the benefits of offering a mixture of academic and vocational subjects because the students were still in compulsory education and they needed access to a broad curriculum. This confirmed the argument that the 14-19 phase in education should be unified rather than divided. Head 2 noted the difference in students' motivation on the NHP in the academic years when GCSEs were not delivered. They also thought that these subjects challenged students in different ways and catered for different learning styles and needs. The academic subjects broadened their views and vocational subjects offered an insight and route to specialised professions. They indicated that all the subjects studied needed to have well-recognised qualifications attached to them as this had an impact on students' motivation and re-engagement although they considered that the extra-curricular activities which were not accredited also had their own value in that they impacted on students' development and how they viewed themselves. They described the positive impact of pedagogy that was adopted on the NHP in terms of smaller class sizes, the way that the curriculum was delivered through a variety of activities that catered for different learning styles and abilities, placing emphasis on student-centred and individualised learning, the NHP's staff support and target-setting. The heads also identified the advantages of continuous assessment of students' work compared to summative assessment.

Quality assurance emerged as an important theme in the analyses of both the CA and college records. In the first stage of NHP implementation, the heads also identified the role of the QAM within the LA. The procedures described to conduct checks on the quality of the NHP indicated that ensuring the suitable AEP for students was of utmost importance for both the LA and college. The review of research findings in Chapter 2 indicated that there has not been sufficient emphasis on the quality of AEPs (OFSTED, 2005). The responses from both heads referred to college procedures that were in place to ensure quality which showed that the college attended to the requirements the LA set out in the CA. It also indicated that the heads valued regular course reviews conducted with all the staff employed on the NHP because these reviews were used to further improve the NHP. The heads also stressed the importance of checking on teaching and learning for both assuring the quality of the provision and attending to staff development. Head 2 considered team teaching and peer observation as particularly useful forms of continuous professional development (CPD), as well as ensuring that staff was kept motivated.

The characteristics of staff and pastoral care offered on the NHP emerged as one of the most important aspects of it. Both heads spoke extensively about the role of staff, staffing issues and pastoral care that was offered on the NHP. They identified that finding the 'right staff' was an issue because not all the teachers wanted to or possessed the necessary skills to teach young people who experience SEBD. The key staff characteristics they identified were empathy, interest in students' lives and a commitment to helping these young people. Head 2 indicated the importance of communication amongst the staff and sharing the information on students' needs in ensuring that these needs were adequately addressed. Staff training was identified as necessary in relevant areas. The crucial support in staff training was that of the LA and the SMT in college. Both heads described the pastoral care that was provided to students as being more intensive in the context of students who experienced SEBD and consisting of addressing their individual needs and barriers to learning and working towards achieving set targets. They indicated that this work required strong commitment and extensive work with parents/carers and external agencies.

The interviews with the NHP's heads on various aspects of the NHP revealed several themes that not only emerged in the examination of documentary evidence, group

discussions with staff, students' questionnaires and the interview with students but also in the literature review and the pre-existing theory. Namely, committed staff interested in helping students to improve their behaviour, achievement and progression; inclusion and adult environment of college; broad curriculum; appropriate pedagogy; a whole-school approach to discipline; the importance of interagency support and collaboration; the role and support of SMT in the implementation of the NHP and quality assurance checks that were put in place to ensure that the NHP was continuously evaluated in terms of whether it successfully re-engaged students in learning and enhanced their progression post-16.

The themes of collaboration and the whole-school approach to discipline also emerged in group discussions with staff. However, the issues of discipline on the programme also emerged from students' questionnaire analysis as one of its main weaknesses in the second stage of its development.

In the next chapter the findings outlined in earlier chapters are discussed in relation to the reviewed literature and the key research questions.

## CHAPTER 9 – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter I explore how this study on the NHP has managed to answer its key research questions. Particular attention has been given to how the ‘knowledge’ of and research findings on the NHP could be applied to improve it, what factors cause educational disengagement, what implications it has for mainstream schools as well as alternative educational provision and how it can enhance the inclusion of the excluded.

This chapter provides further analysis and comparison of research findings, it summarises how and why the data were collected and analysed through the application of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory and symbolic interactionism, in order to answer the research questions. The research findings are pulled together to describe the impact of each ecological system examined in this study on the development of young people. It suggests changes that need to be made in each system if the education system as a whole is to achieve its main aim - to cater for the individual needs of all learners, to prevent them from becoming NEET and disengaged and excluded from the educational system and to enhance their smooth and successful progression to adulthood, thus preventing them from becoming socially excluded in their adult years.

This chapter uses the key research questions of the study to structure each section. The discussion takes place within the conceptual framework outlined in the literature review and the findings from different aspects of the data collected. Under each research question the discussion centres on the themes that emerged from the data analysis. This forms the basis for the conclusions in chapter 10.

### 9.1 HOW CAN ‘BEST’ GUIDE A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES?

Bronfenbrenner (1976: 5) stated three basic requirements that needed to be met ‘if we are to make progress in the scientific study of educational systems and processes.’ The first requirement is that research ‘must be carried out in real-life educational

settings'. Second, in order to understand whether and how people learn in educational settings the focus for educational research needs to be on the investigation of the relations between the characteristics of learners and their surroundings (e.g. home, school) as well as the relations and interconnections between these environments. The third requirement refers to 'the strategy of choice for investigating person-environment and environment-environment relations' (p. 5).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (BEST), which also underpins the research findings examined and outlined in the literature review in Chapter 2, is used to investigate the young people's life circumstances and their educational experiences, as well as the involvement and the role of other factors and systems that might impact on and cause disaffection.

The methodological approach adopted in this study explored the setting (the NHP) and the meanings that different participants in the study attached to different eco-systems that surrounded them. The setting, as an important *micro-system* was examined through the investigation of documentary evidence that was used to record and measure the outcomes of the NHP for students in terms of their attendance, attainment and progress. Documentary evidence also showed the importance of effective collaboration and relationships amongst the different agencies involved in the establishment, development and day-to-day operation of the NHP, thus revealing the importance of *meso-systems* in the young people's development. The examination of the role of the LA, as an *exo-system*, indicated the importance of its involvement in the implementation and development of the NHP. It showed that the LA has a key role in ensuring the inclusion of all pupils and it indicated that the London Borough of East End LA attended to the requirements of educational policy on inclusion in terms of ensuring a suitable educational provision for young people who are excluded from mainstream schools. In building an effective partnership with the local college of further education and ensuring collaboration of the different agencies that are involved in young people's lives, it thus complied with the requirements of ECM policy. It also built effective strategies to assure the quality of alternative educational provision. The LA's internal influence on the NHP implementation and development was seen in the involvement of the SMT in the college and the raising of the profile of the NHP students within the college through ensuring their inclusion and access to

vocational courses within the mainstream programme areas. This indicates that the successful re-engagement and re-integration of young people who experience SEBD can be achieved through collaboration between the different 'actors' that are involved in the young people's development. It also showed that colleges of further education are in a good position to cater for these young people's needs if they adapt their inclusion practices and provide effective pastoral care.

Naturalistic inquiry requires that the researcher focuses on how people act towards things in natural, everyday settings, how they create the meanings that these things have for them and finally how they interpret the events that happen in their world. In order to examine the NHP in its natural, real-life setting and to explore different meanings that were attached to emergent themes, various participants were involved in this study including the NHP's students, staff and management. This allowed me 'to step into the shoes' of the young people that I was studying and to hear their stories and experiences, thus empowering their voice. Students' background and causes of disaffection with education were described in individual case studies. Students' views on their experiences of education in school and on the NHP and the relationships that existed in these educational institutions were also examined in the questionnaires and interviews that were conducted with students. Furthermore, these findings provided the description of the characteristics of students, the environments which surrounded them and the relations and interconnections between these environments which refer to BEST's micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-systems.

The themes that emerged from these findings indicated that the young people, who are the subject of this study, attached different meanings to staff, pastoral care, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and discipline in each institution. They revealed that the meanings the students attached to these themes were influenced by their individual and personal experiences. The findings were analysed and interpreted according to a symbolic interactionism perspective which 'does not regard meaning as emanating from the intrinsic makeup of the thing that has meaning, nor does it see meaning as arising through a coalescence of psychological elements in the person' (Blumer, 1969: 4). Instead, it sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people. Symbolic interactionism requires the examination of the subjects'

points of view and the meaning or meanings they attribute to the experiences and events they encounter. This allows the researcher to see the world from the angle of the subjects she studies (Stryker, 1976: 259). Thus, this view attended to the definition of SEBD that was adopted in Chapter 2, which required that different systems that impact on the development of young people be examined alongside the personal characteristics and immediate environment of the young people.

The analysis of data was conducted and discussed in the light of 'theoretical sensitivity' that I have developed through reading the literature around the key concepts in this study – the 14-19 curriculum, alternative educational provision and the context and definition of SEBD. This approach to the study implies and suggests that there is a mutual interdependence of the individual parts of the research process thus giving preference to the data and the field under study rather than simply applying theoretical assumptions. This enabled the discovery and development of theory through a systematic collection of data and increasing complexity by including the context. This approach demands that the researcher generates theory from a variety of data collected through naturalistic inquiry with the aim of helping programme staff and decision makers analyse and understand how the NHP functions, why it functions the way it does, and investigate how the impact and outcomes of the programme derive from programme's operation and activities. In addition to this, the systematic data collection was combined with analysis of the data which pertain to the phenomena under investigation. The application of BEST to data collection allowed the themes relevant to the study to emerge from the research findings through the voices of the young people and the programme staff. Furthermore, it suits the purpose of this study and is relevant to NHP staff and decision makers since it allows them to empirically test their own theories of programme activities, programme effects, and the relationship among activities, impacts and outcomes.

An examination of the views of the staff and management identified what factors and programme features they considered as important in attending to these young people's needs and contributing to their engagement with education. The involvement of all of the above mentioned stakeholders was also necessary to ensure reliability and validity of research findings due to my role on the programme and as an insider researcher so that any biases could be detected and avoided.

The examination of the English education system for 14-19 year olds, the analysis of student interviews, group discussions with the NHP staff and interviews with the management in this study confirmed the research findings from Chapter 2 that there were indeed a number of factors which impact on the development of SEBD and cause disaffection, other than just the personal characteristics of these young people. This would suggest that these difficulties are not inherent in young people who experience SEBD but are the consequence of the interplay of a variety of other factors interacting with the personal characteristics of the young person.

## 9.2 WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY FOR THE CURRENT DEBATE ON THE 14-19 EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM DESIGN?

The first step in this evaluation was to examine the development of the English education system for 14-19 year olds. The education system represents Bronfenbrenner's macro-system in which the students are not directly involved but which, nevertheless, greatly influences their educational experiences in terms of the curriculum that it offers and the assessment and pedagogy that are adopted to deliver it. It also has a direct impact on how exo-, meso- and micro-systems operate, which practices they introduce and it largely dictates what aims and objectives are adopted in educational institutions and how they are achieved. This requires an examination of the impact of the education system itself since it indirectly influences the development of young people, their future progression in education, training and employment and the acquisition of skills and qualifications that are necessary for their successful progression.

The impact of the English education system for 14-19 year olds as an important macro-system was examined in Chapter 1. It described the educational policies that were introduced and were designed to tackle disengagement through various government initiatives. However, these policies showed little success in re-engaging the young people who experience SEBD. The overemphasis in policy on results in examinations, marketisation of education, division between the academic and vocational curriculum and selection of students leaves little chance for the most vulnerable young people from deprived backgrounds who are condemned to suffer



sustained consequences of educational disenchantment in terms of long-term unemployment, poor mental health issues and in extreme cases criminal involvement (Copps and Keen, 2009; Hallam and Rogers, 2008; Hodgson and Spours, 2008). This was also evident from the research on the number of young people who are not in education, training and/or employment which remained unchanged at around 10 per cent mainly in the most deprived areas (SFR, 2014). Research findings also suggested that schools in deprived areas needed improvement in terms of educational attainment and quality, and recommended that individually tailored policies needed to be implemented to suit local needs rather than generic measures (Lupton, 2004).

There has been considerable debate about the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) definition of social exclusion (Hills et al, 2002). There is a recognition that social exclusion can be intergenerational and the research findings from students' backgrounds in this study indicated that often the parents of young people who are the subject of this study were unemployed and lacked any qualifications. To break this cycle, prevention in the early years of education through programmes such as Sure Start (Carpenter et al, 2005) and On Track (Parsons et al, 2003) were introduced by the previous government. The research findings on these studies showed that early intervention was an effective strategy in preventing children from becoming disengaged in the later stages of their education.

The period of adolescence is an important stage in the development of human beings in which major changes happen within young people. The research findings suggested that the experiences of this stage of education largely determined young people's successful transition to adulthood. Research findings in this study indicated that changes in the KS4 curriculum can alter the educational experiences of these young people if an alternative curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and so on are implemented. These research findings supported the view that the curriculum for 14-19 year olds needed a radical overhaul rather than just the introduction of new vocational qualifications for those who disengage or underachieve in mainstream education.

The Dearing Report (1996) recommended changes to vocational qualifications noting that the division of the curriculum into academic and vocational was inhibiting learner progress and suggested the introduction of a more coherent national framework of qualifications with an overarching certificate that would accommodate different levels

of attainment. The Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004) recommended a unified system of qualifications which would introduce a broader education for all. The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training in England and Wales (2009) identified the need for vocational learning and the work-based route to be given a larger and higher status role in a unified and coherent educational system for 14-19 year olds. In the 2000s, the government placed more emphasis on the development of the 14-19 phase of education and training in an attempt to address educational disengagement in this phase. The New Labour government's education policies attempted to enhance the curriculum and increased the number of qualification pathways for 14-19- year-olds (Duffy and Elwood, 2013). These changes resulted in the creation of an alternative and vocational curriculum for those who were less able, disadvantaged and disaffected with the national curriculum (DfES, 2002; DfES, 2003b).

Hayward and Williams (2011: 184) noted that although alternative provision could engage young people, the findings from the Engaging Youth Enquiry indicated that in terms of making progress these interventions had limited value. The findings from the student questionnaires in this study also showed that not all the students made a successful transition to the post-16 phase. The establishment of alternative provision for those young people who are disaffected with mainstream education could be viewed as the first step in social exclusion as their choices of future education, training and employment are limited. It is for these reasons that the maintaining of the division of education into academic and vocational and the privileging of academic subjects can have a potentially detrimental impact on these young people's further progression in education, training and employment.

Thus, the discussion on the impact of the education system on the disengagement of young people with education and the views expressed by the young people in this study are relevant and have important implications for the current debate on the 14-19 curriculum. The introduction of RPA to the age of 18 in 2015 will require all young people to stay in education or training longer, but whether the attendance, retention and achievement of the young people who experience SEBD will be satisfactory depends very much on the curriculum and pastoral care offered to them. This was evident in the responses of the young people in this study on the reasons for their 'dropping out' from mainstream courses in the post-16 phase. In addition to offering

an engaging curriculum that is relevant to their future choice of careers and adequate pastoral care which could increase young people's aspirations and motivation to study, Hayward and Williams identified that government policies needed to acknowledge the changes in opportunity structures which have happened as a result of the changing 'inter-relationships between family backgrounds, education, labour market processes and employer recruitment practices' (Roberts, 2009: 355 cited in Hayward and Williams, 2011: 185). They noted that young people with few or no qualifications were particularly affected by economic downturns and that the impact of long-term structural and economic change is as important in considering the issues that impact on young people at risk of becoming 'NEET' as is the education and training that is on offer to them.

Although the Coalition government supports the raising of the participation age which suggests some continuity between pre- and post-16 education, in their Schools White Paper, *The importance of teaching*, it made distinct differences between schools and colleges and pre- and post-16 education (DfE, 2010). Higham and Yeomans (2011) wrote that the Coalition Government's focus so far has been on 'toughening-up' general education, particularly GCSEs and A levels. It introduced the new performance measure that favours GCSEs, the English Baccalaureate which consists of the attainment of five GCSE A\*-C grades in English, mathematics, science, a humanity and a language. Hodgson and Spours (2011: 148) noted that 'schools now need to concentrate on a traditional, subject-based curriculum up to the age of 16, rather than offering the mix of general and applied qualifications associated with the New Labour's linked approach to 14-19 education and training'. The Coalition government policy outlined in the *Building Engagement, Building Futures* document (DBIS, 2011) recognised that those students who do not achieve were less likely to participate in education and training and that strategic intervention during early and teenage years is essential. It identified that providing apprenticeships, coherent vocational education within 16-19 provision, financial resources and the introduction of the 'youth contract' were key areas essential to improving engagement (DfE, 2011). In the Review of 14-19 Vocational Education, Professor Wolf (2011) criticised the fact that many young people were taking vocational subjects and qualifications that were not valued in the labour market nor offered progression to further education

or transition into work but there were no clear indications regarding how these qualifications would be reformed.

The research findings from students' interviews and group discussions with the programme staff in this study indicated that the students only valued the well recognised qualifications that were on offer in mainstream schools. This indicated that the answer is not in providing an alternative education for those students who are disengaged with the national curriculum, but that solutions lie in the creation of qualifications that would include a balance of both academic and vocational subjects and modes of assessment with work-related provision for *all* students. Thus, the introduction of the English Baccalaureate as a benchmark is likely to further exacerbate the disengagement of young people who are experiencing SEBD and as a result underachieve in mainstream schools.

### 9.3 WHAT ARE THE VIEWS OF STUDENTS AND STAFF ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NHP?

The aim of the main research question that was posed in the introductory chapter of this thesis was to investigate the effectiveness of the NHP on students' achievement and progression. The ultimate aim of this study is to reveal the impact of different systems on students' disengagement with the KS4 curriculum (currently the last two years of compulsory education) and to examine what lessons can be learnt to accommodate the view that education needs to cater for all regardless of their personal characteristics, immediate environments that surround them and socio-economic status. As we are rapidly approaching the introduction of the RPA to 18 in 2015, such investigations into the types of programmes that would engage these young learners become increasingly important if we are to offer an equal opportunity to education for all young people. I mentioned above that Bronfenbrenner (1976) stressed that the educational researchers should focus on the investigation of the characteristics of learners and their surroundings, and the interconnections between them to enable them to understand the subjects they study and whether and how they learn. In order to attend to these requirements, I conducted the questionnaires and interviews with students who were participants on the NHP and group discussions and interviews with the staff and the NHP management.

For all the learner interviewees, college was a completely different experience from school. The interviews gave them an opportunity to describe their experiences in both educational institutions. They considered their college experience better than that in their school(s) in terms of its relevance to their future careers; its effectiveness in engaging them with education and in equipping them with qualifications necessary for further progression in education, training and employment; and the exercise of justice and freedom which they felt were missing or restricted in schools. The majority of students indicated that their attendance improved when they started attending the NHP because they enjoyed the adult environment in college. They stated that the NHP staff treated them like adults, respected their views, listened to them and were more approachable than the staff in mainstream schools. The students also felt that the smaller class size was beneficial since the teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) were able to devote more time to individual students who needed more help. Students also said that they were less reluctant and embarrassed to ask for help when the class was smaller and when they were aware that the other students in the class also needed help.

The responses from the student interviews revealed that the relationships with staff were important factors that contributed to the engagement of these young people with education. They identified that pastoral care and a different approach to learning and management of students' behaviour on the NHP helped them to improve their attendance, behaviour and achievement. Students found that the work and continuous assessment in the classes on the NHP were more relevant and engaging than the work they were given in mainstream schools which most of them found too difficult or not interesting. They considered that the qualifications that they achieved upon the completion of the NHP enabled them to enrol on the mainstream courses within different areas in college. However, a minority of students expressed interest in studying more academic subjects alongside the vocational subjects while they were attending the NHP. When GCSE qualifications were replaced with alternative qualifications in English and Mathematics, the students felt less motivated to study these subjects because they did not see the relevance of these qualifications to their further progression in education, employment and training. In addition to this, the fact that they could not take the core qualifications that were offered in all mainstream schools reiterated their feelings of underachievement and not having the intellectual

ability to study these subjects. For the great majority of young people college was ‘a fresh start’ and they were aware of the factors that may have caused their disengagement with mainstream education. In discussing the reasons for their referral to the NHP, the young people described their circumstances and it was evident that there were other factors alongside the curriculum, pedagogy and discipline in school that related to their personal circumstances at home or in the immediate environment, such as issues concerning peers and culture. The majority of young people who were interviewed were eligible for free school meals (FSM) which indicated that their parents were not employed or were in low-waged employment. These family circumstances might have negatively impacted on their motivation and engagement in education. Furthermore, many of the parents of these students did not possess any qualifications.

Similarly, the NHP’s heads identified that the staff characteristics and the attitudes and approaches they employed towards the young people, in and outside of the classroom, played an important role in ‘reaching’ them. The staff responses showed that these professionals shared similar views about, and interest in, the young people and their personal circumstances. Their common goal was a commitment to help these young people to achieve their potential. Both staff and management highlighted the importance of setting short- and long-term targets for the young people and having high expectations of the students in enabling their progress and attainment. They stated that the emphasis was placed on teaching and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour and the recognition of the consequences of their actions. Strong emphasis was also placed on a whole-institutional approach to discipline and behaviour which enabled all the staff who were involved in working with the young people to address any disciplinary issues. The staff agreed that a college environment, which was more relaxed than mainstream schools, and the treatment of young people as adults were both critical to the success of the NHP and students’ progress. In addition to these factors, both staff and students considered that the mixture of academic and vocational subjects contributed to the young people’s re-engagement with education since they could see the relevance of the subjects they were studying to their future career opportunities. As a result, they changed their attitudes towards work set in class and towards education as a whole. The examination of the college database in Chapter 4 indicated that the students’

achievement was higher than the national averages in most subjects that were offered on the NHP in any given year. Students' responses in the interviews indicated that most achieved higher grades in their GCSE exams than they were predicted to achieve had they stayed in mainstream schools. The participation in extra-curricular activities was also seen by the staff as beneficial in developing the various skills necessary for successful progression to further education, employment and/or training. Both staff and management agreed that collaboration between different agencies was beneficial because it ensured that the information about young people was shared, which in turn enabled all the agencies that were involved with the young people to put in place adequate measures that would meet their individual needs. In addition to this, the establishment of good communication with parents/carers was essential in gaining their support in engaging young people as well as informing them regularly about their children's attendance, behaviour, achievement and any other needs that related to and impacted on their successful progress.

Apart from personal characteristics and circumstances, it was also recognised in the literature that, 'in some cases, emotional and behavioural difficulties may arise from or be exacerbated by circumstances within the school environment.' (DFE, 1994: 64). This indicates that SEBD is socially constructed and could be linked to a particular activity and/or environment. Symbolic interactionism suggested that people create meanings according to the experiences they encounter in relation to these meanings. The students' views on education changed when they started to attend college because their experience of education changed. The themes that emerged in students' interviews indicated what students considered as important in their engagement with education. These themes, which relate to the different approach to teaching, pedagogy, discipline and relationships with the teaching staff, could explain why students who were otherwise disengaged with mainstream education, succeeded on the NHP.

The research findings from studies on AEPs, outlined in Chapter 2, as well as research findings from the NHP indicate that the investigation into educational disengagement requires an examination of the complex multitude of factors that underlie it. These factors include Child factors, Economic factors, Parent factors and School factors (Bynner, 2000). The description of students' background, the analysis of their

experiences of education and the reasons for their disaffection with mainstream education that emerged from the interviews as well as from group discussions and interviews with programme staff and management, confirmed Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1970) which guided the research design in this study and identified that this complex set of factors influence a child and young person's development. Thus, it is argued here that to successfully tackle educational disengagement all of these factors need to be taken into account and an adequate intervention to address them put in place. Some of these factors, such as economic, community, parent and peer group factors, would be difficult to change through education policies. But those factors that relate to school, education, qualifications policy, pedagogy, curriculum and a high quality workforce certainly can be changed by government policies. Areas that have been highlighted in this study include the need for appropriate curriculum and qualifications reforms that are designed for the whole 14-19 cohort and the provision of teacher training programmes (both initial and continuing professional development) that have an emphasis on curriculum design, motivational pedagogy, developing effective relationships between learners and teachers, consistent behaviour management, working collaboratively with external agencies and a focus on all learners progressing to further study and employment. The introduction of the Raising of Participation Age (RPA) to 18 in the near future could be beneficial for this cohort of students if appropriate measures are taken on the part of government (Spielhofer, 2009).

#### 9.4 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY'S FINDINGS FOR ECO-SYSTEMS INVOLVED IN THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENT

The research findings outlined above indicate that changes need to be made not only in the immediate environment that encompasses young people but also to other eco-systems that are indirectly involved in the young people's development and impact on their educational experiences.

In relation to educational institutions, namely schools and Alternative Educational Provision (AEP), defined by Bronfenbrenner as important settings of the micro- and meso-system, this means the adoption of an approach which emphasises the creation



of ‘a safe, supportive and caring school environment, inclusiveness and a student-centredness that focuses on the whole student (personal, social and academic)’ (De Jong, 2005; McPartland, 1994 cited in Hallam and Rogers, 2008: 12-13). These interrelations within the setting containing the developing person Bronfenbrenner identified as a meso-system. They encompass interactions among family, school and the young person. Research suggested that if we are to meet the needs of children and young people who experience SEBDs then we have to understand biological, psychological and social influences which affect behaviour (Cooper, 1999: 239).

This study examined the views of young people, staff and management on the different factors that caused disengagement and the practices adopted on the NHP that tackled disengagement and enhanced students’ progress. The analysis of group discussions, the responses from student questionnaires and interviews with students in this study identified that the curriculum offered in the NHP in the second stage of its implementation was one of its main weaknesses. The literature review also indicated that curriculum reforms were not designed to cater for the needs of students who were disengaged and they were disproportionately excluded from mainstream schools. Those who were excluded were also more likely to complete their compulsory education without any qualifications that would allow them to successfully progress in education, training and employment thus ending up as a NEET group. However, the discussion of the curriculum and the education system has inevitably led to an examination of the curriculum ideology that lays the foundation for the design of the educational system in any country. Bronfenbrenner (1976: 81) called this influential part of eco-systems a macro-system ....

‘an overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture such as economic, social, educational, legal and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exo-systems are the concrete manifestations’.

Bronfenbrenner’s eco-systems thus guide the structure of this argument suggesting that one needs to probe even further to the core of these other systems to be able to recognise what causes educational disengagement, where and what changes need to be made and finally how these interventions are to be implemented.

It is argued here that to effectively target educational disengagement, there need to be changes in different eco-systems beyond the changes in local micro-, meso- and exo-systems that operate in different educational settings such as schools and AEPs.

#### 9.4.1 CHANGES IN MICRO- AND MESO-SYSTEMS - SCHOOL AS A COMMUNITY

The evidence from the studies examined in Chapter 2 and the research findings in this study show that these alternative educational initiatives had positive outcomes for young people who experience SEBD in several areas, including their attitude towards education, educational attainment, behaviour and self-esteem and progression to further education, training and employment. They were described as more supportive, nurturing and challenging for pupils experiencing SEBD than some mainstream schools (e.g. Macnab et al, 2008; Lovering et al, 2006; McNeil and Smith, 2004; Kendall et al, 2003; Reid, 2002, 2003; Morris, 1996). The analysis of the responses in the student questionnaires and the interviews with students in this study also confirmed that one of the main strengths of the NHP was the support the students received from the NHP staff, whom they described as approachable and friendly. Similarly, the group discussions and interviews with the heads of the NHP noted the importance of caring, understanding and compassionate staff who were interested in students and their lives.

According to Vygotsky (1978) learning is a shared process in a responsive social context. Based on Vygotsky's definition, it is argued here that learning facilitated within a responsive and supportive environment can promote the development of positive behaviour and overcome the barriers that lead to disengagement and hinder positive educational and life outcomes. Formal education is a social process where students learn in cooperation and interaction with their teachers, classmates, and other school staff. As such, the social and emotional aspects of development play a key role in educational outcomes, and these aspects must be addressed by schools (Zins et al., 2004).

Attachment theory (Ainsworth et al, 1978) posits that children become securely attached to caring, sensitive, and nurturing caregivers who provide challenging learning opportunities to overcome risks and challenges. These attachments, identified in student questionnaires, interviews with students and group discussions with the NHP staff in this study, could be seen in the close relationships between teachers and students, which provided the young people with socially valued personal attributes such as high self-esteem, social competence and a positive attitude towards education. With this in mind, what emerged from the literature and research is that through the appropriate delivery of initiatives designed to promote secure interpersonal relationships that provide a firm foundation of support, challenge, and control, schools can break the cycle of disaffection by providing the secure and caring environment that all young people need to progress further in their education, training and employment.

A research study conducted by Solomon et al. (1996, and 1997) showed that caring support and firm and consistent authoritative control is established within schools which adopt a community ethos. They defined a *community* as ‘a social organization whose members know, care about and support one another, have common goals in the sense of shared purpose, and to which they actively contribute and feel personally committed.’ (Solomon et al, 1996: 720). The research findings from group discussions and interviews with the NHP’s heads and students in this study also indicated that placing high expectations on students and giving them the feeling of being a part of ‘the programme community’ had a positive impact on their attitudes and behaviour in and beyond the classroom. The effectiveness of such an initiative provided evidence for Bronfenbrenner’s eco-systems theory that the developing person is susceptible to different environmental influences. It is suggested here that educational initiatives that focus on enhancing emotional stability through supportive and caring environment and teaching staff are beneficial in developing a framework for meeting the personal, social, and emotional needs of students experiencing SEBD within the educational setting.

#### 9.4.2 CHANGES IN EXO-SYSTEMS – THE ROLE OF THE LA, CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

In addition to providing a supportive school environment that encourages and motivates young people experiencing SEBD and helps them to perceive the relevance of school to future work and learning, the research evidence also suggests that changing curriculum content, assessment and pedagogy, which gives the basic structure to the delivery of the curriculum, could be used as a means of reducing exclusions (OFSTED, 1996; Daniels et al., 1998). The changes in the KS4 curriculum, examined in Chapter 1 in this study, were introduced by the New Labour government's policy on reforming and disapplication of the KS4 curriculum including the introduction of work-related learning (WRL). These initiatives to implement social inclusion practices were designed to improve the curriculum for KS4 pupils, to reduce exclusion rates and to meet individual needs (DfES, 2003b). The evaluation of WRL schemes also showed a positive impact of these initiatives on re-engaging young people (Kinder et al. 2000; DfES, 2001).

The analysis of students' achievement in documentary evidence, the analysis of group discussions with the NHP staff, the responses in student questionnaires as well as findings from interviews with the students and the NHP's heads also indicate that an alternative curriculum design which combines academic and vocational subjects with extracurricular activities, alongside different approach to pedagogy, has a positive impact on students' motivation and re-engagement with education. In addition to these factors, the staff also stressed the importance of effective collaboration and communication between different agencies in sharing the information about the young people and their needs. The role of the LA emerged as a vital feature in supporting the development of the NHP and assuring its quality.

In Chapter 1, I concluded that the division between academic and vocational education, the low status of vocational education, the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and the exclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) in England were all inter-related and problematic features of the English system. Furthermore, the Wolf report (2011) that promoted the introduction of a broad academic curriculum at KS4 could exacerbate

this situation for the most vulnerable young people. As we are rapidly approaching the Raising of the Participation Age to the age of 18 in 2015, the importance of designing the education system to accommodate all 14-19 year olds is becoming pressing. Spielhofer et al (2007) suggested that RPA would be likely to have a particular impact on the young people who were disengaged with mainstream schooling. In their study, which examined the opinions of young people who were NEET, Spielhofer et al. (2009) found that the young people thought that this policy would encourage education and training providers to develop courses which offer non-classroom based provision and more practical learning suitable to all young people's needs, levels of learning and preferred learning style. These findings clearly showed that designing and providing a curriculum that encompasses academic, vocational and work-based learning, adapted to suit the local needs which would engage all young people, is of the utmost importance.

The discussion of a curriculum, assessment and pedagogy that would successfully engage all students, including those with SEN, requires an examination of theories of learning. Kolb's model of experiential learning (1984) advocated learners being given the chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting. Houle (1980: 221) explained experiential learning as 'education that occurs as a direct participation in the events of life.' This implies the need both for the acquisition of general knowledge, which includes academic and vocational learning and the application of this knowledge in the type of practical, every-day activities that work-related learning offers. Kolb and Fry's (1975) model of experiential learning entailed four elements: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. They argued that the learning cycle could begin at any one of these four points but that effective learning required the possession of all four abilities. They suggested that most people develop strengths in one or more of these abilities. Accordingly, they developed a learning style inventory (1976) which was designed to place people on a line between concrete experience and abstract conceptualization; and active experimentation and reflective observation. Using this they identified four basic learning styles which reflect these abilities. In developing this model, they challenged those models of learning that reduce learners' potential to one dimension, such as intelligence. Starting from the preferred learning style, the other styles of learning are then developed through the application of

effective and adequate pedagogies and design of appropriate activities. Thus, this model provides a differentiated and comprehensive framework for planning teaching and learning activities that cater for students with SEN. Furthermore, the experiential model of learning is based on an individualised learning approach which places the student at the centre of the learning process through the identification of her/his individual learning needs and targets-setting related to these needs. In the evaluation of the NHP, this approach to teaching, assessment and recording students' progress was evident in an examination of the documentary evidence. The NHP's heads and staff also identified the importance of individualised learning. The participants in Spielhofer's (2007) research identified this as an important approach in the context of the students who are disengaged with education and experience SEBD.

Moreover, this approach to teaching and learning could accommodate preferences for both academic and vocational learning in an education system that adopts 'a more open and inclusive approach to general education which will offer all 14-19-year-olds different types of general education, including practical, applied, experiential and community-based learning which will be motivational and which they can pursue beyond the age of 16' (Hodgson and Spours, 2008: 29).

The examination and evaluation of alternative educational programmes which cater for the disaffected cohort of students and listening to these young people's voices could provide useful insights into good practices and approaches that need to be adopted in re-engaging and educating 14-19 year-olds.

#### 9.4.3 CHANGES IN THE MACRO SYSTEM – THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND CURRICULUM IDEOLOGY

The previous section considered the changes needed in the exo-system and suggested that the curriculum and pedagogy needed to be adapted to suit the needs of the local population and that an individualised approach to learning would accommodate different aspirations, interest, abilities and learning needs. The LA was identified as having a key role in ensuring the educational inclusion of all young people and

facilitating collaboration amongst the different ‘actors’ that are involved in the development and education of young people. However, BEST indicates that the changes in the exo-system are largely dependent on the macro-system which Bronfenbrenner conceived as

‘carriers of information and ideology that both explicitly and implicitly, endow meaning and motivation to particular agencies, social networks, roles, activities, and their interrelations. What place or priority children and those responsible for their care have in such macro-systems is of special importance in determining how a child or her caretakers are treated and interact with each other in different types of settings’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1976: 81).

In relation to education system and curriculum design, Neary (2002: 58) stated that ‘the relative emphasis given in curriculum planning to factors such as content, processes, context, the role of the learner, have a number of important implications’. The importance which we attach to these different factors of curriculum design and implementation will depend on our perspectives on the nature of the curriculum and the students for whom this curriculum is intended. The perspective I adopted here is Jenkins and Shipman’s (1976 cited in Woolhouse et al., 2001: 36) definition of the curriculum who stated that,

‘A curriculum is concerned with prerequisites (antecedents, intentions), with transactions (what actually goes on in classrooms as the essential meanings are negotiated between teachers and taught, and worthwhile activities undertaken), and with outcomes (the knowledge and skill acquired by students, attitude changes, intended and unintended side effects etc.)’.

This definition of curriculum suggests that the curriculum is a complex entity and that designing a successful curriculum is a demanding task that requires consideration of different factors and the involvement of educationalists who bring to this process a range of professional skills and knowledge. It also implies that the curriculum design has a great impact not only on the knowledge and skills that the students are expected to attain but also on their overall development and well-being. Thus, the role of the learner should be at the heart of curriculum design in any educational system. Instead,

Neary (2002: 58) wrote, the most prevalent approach over the last two centuries has been the liberal-humanist model which is a knowledge-centred curriculum based on subjects and ‘was only suitable for the more able learner and was argued to be not sufficiently relevant to real life’. In contrast to this teacher-centred model, Neary considered that Dewey’s progressivism (1916), which places the learner at the centre of the educational and learning process and aims to develop the learner’s potential, influenced the debate on the National Curriculum. However, Neary (2002) noted that the New Labour government adopted an instrumental curriculum, which was teacher/trainer led, and its aim was to develop a skilled workforce with competent levels of numeracy, literacy, science and technology.

Tyler’s objective model of curriculum design (1949) suggested that the teacher first sets the aims and objectives; and then considers the content or subject matter of what is taught in lessons including the teaching and learning methods by which the subject is taught. This enables the learners to achieve the desired aims and objectives as it places the emphasis on the importance of the learner. This model is a useful approach to teaching as its components interrelate and influence each other which allows efficient planning for differentiated activities in terms of teaching, learning and assessment methods which cater for individual learner’s needs and different learning styles. Thus, aims and objectives are achieved through the application of Kolb’s experiential learning which emphasises building on learners’ existing knowledge, skills and experiences and allows the pace of learning to suit the needs of each individual.

In the context of the young people who experience SEBD, this model allows the learners to see the relevance of what they are studying and the sense of achievement when previous experiences are called upon and reliance on the application of existing knowledge and skills in the process of learning. In addition to this, learners’ active involvement in different activities and an opportunity for continuous assessment, evaluation and feedback on learning objectives are also valuable for building learners’ confidence and self-esteem.

In addition to these traditional curriculum ideologies outlined above, Kelly (2009: 91) suggested an ideology that is firmly rooted in a concept of social democracy based on democratic principles of freedom and equality. Thus, this approach to curriculum



‘begins from a view of society as democratic, of human beings as individuals entitled within such a society to freedom and equality and of education to be designed and planned in such a way as to prepare and empower such individuals for active and productive life within a democratic social context.’ This view termed ‘child-centred’ takes as the starting point for educational planning a concern with ‘the nature of the child and with his or her development as a human being’. It sees ‘education as the process by which human animals are assisted to become human beings’ (Kelly, 2009: 91). Kelly sees formal education ‘as some kind of guided development. The key issue is thus the nature of that guidance.’ The above definition of curriculum is then further refined in a view that ‘The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts stored.’ (Hadow Report, Board of Education, 1931: para. 75, cited in Kelly, 2009: 89). This view invites the consideration of ‘how our knowledge of children should be reflected in our educational planning’ (pg. 89) thus ‘marrying’ educational theory and practice. The focus here then is the process of the development of understanding rather than the acquisition of knowledge. It was suggested above that Kolb’s experiential learning model accommodates this idea since it emphasised the reflection on concrete experiences which need to be applied in new situations. This is opposed to the knowledge-based curriculum which Neary (2002) considered as only accessible to the most able students leaving behind those who struggle in academic work.

The central attribute of the developmental view of education is that it begins from human development and of ‘human potentiality’. Its basic assumption is that the individual is an active being, entitled to control its own future, and that through education this control should be maximised. Bernstein (1996) called this a ‘competence’ as opposed to a ‘performance’ mode of pedagogic practice (cited in Kelly, 2009: 99). Kelly advised that this view required that educational theory and practice promote ‘the development of the child’s growing ability to act autonomously, so that the promotion of autonomy becomes a major principle of one’s educational practice.’ She wrote that the promotion of autonomy ‘does not signify a freedom from constraints’ but requires the development of different abilities of understanding, reflecting and critical thinking which would enable young people to make the personal choices, decisions and judgements implied by autonomous living.

This section examined the approaches to curriculum ideology and the place that the learner should have in the teaching and learning process since they form the basis of how the education system and national qualifications are designed. The objective model of curriculum design and the developmental view of education stress the importance of the individual learner who is involved in the learning process and encouraged to learn through direct experience and discovery. They also reflect the principles of adult education which places the responsibility for learning on each individual learner. Apart from this, they give an opportunity to build students' basic skills, to apply their creative skills and improve their literacy and numeracy through activities embedded and applied in practical tasks. These models make learning more effective and meaningful.

#### 9.4.4 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, I argued, based on Bronfenbrenner's theory of development, that the 14-19 phase in education of young people is an important developmental stage in their lives during which they have to make crucial decisions that influence their future. The adoption of a developmental model of the curriculum based on experiential learning would educate young people how to positively exercise this autonomy and would allow them to develop different skills that are needed to make a successful progression to further education, employment or training. The acquisition of different skills that would enable them to make informed career choices would make them feel that they were able to control their own destiny, which is important during the adolescent years when young people often come into conflict with adults. To develop this autonomy in learning and to equip all young people with skills necessary for their future employment, there is a need for academic, vocational and work-related experiences as the supporters of the unified educational system advocate, as well as an emphasis on personal and social development through individualised learning. The issue then is not just what the curriculum offers but how it is offered, what pedagogies are used, the staff training, the organisation of schools as communities and the role of the learner in the curriculum design. It is suggested here that an approach to curriculum delivery based on Kolb's experiential learning, which advocates that learning can begin at different stages depending on the individual student's ability,

aspiration and prior experience, places the learner at the heart of the teaching and learning process and could successfully engage young people disenchanted with education.

This approach to curriculum was also re-enforced by the findings in the semi-structured interviews with the NHP's Heads who considered the importance of the development of the whole person through an individualised approach to learning. This approach then calls for changes in all the Key Stages of the National Curriculum not only in KS4 to ensure early intervention and to prevent disengagement in later years especially as the young people approach adolescence. The curriculum approach which is needed for the disaffected cohort requires a move to a student-centred approach, with an emphasis on the development of social and life skills alongside both academic and vocational elements, in a unified educational system rather than separating these skills through the current divided educational system. It was evident from the examination of literature in Chapter 1 that successive governments have attempted to address educational disengagement and school exclusions through various policies and initiatives. However, the issues of disengagement and underachievement in poorer areas remain unchanged and they are serious causes for concern. With the labour market requiring a more educated work force and offering fewer jobs for the unskilled and the high number of young people who are NEET, there is a need to ensure that all young people not only achieve basic skills in Literacy and Numeracy but also qualifications that will allow them to compete in the challenging and rapidly changing labour market and to secure worthwhile jobs and a decent standard of living.

It could be argued that Wolf's proposals for the introduction of a broad academic curriculum in KS4 revert back to the liberal humanist tradition's knowledge-based curriculum, which accommodates only those learners interested in academic subjects and leaves behind those students who experience SEBD and as a consequence, disengage with main-stream curriculum.

## **CHAPTER 10 – DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY, FURTHER RESEARCH AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE**

### **DISCUSSION**

When I first embarked on this research, having worked with young people who were disengaged from education due to their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties for a long period of time, I expected to find that young people preferred college to school and that their experiences of education on the NHP would have been affected by the teaching staff, their teaching strategies and their approach to pastoral care and discipline. It was students' steady progress in terms of their behaviour and attainment in the face of their disengagement from school that prompted this study in the first place to gain an understanding of what the critical factors were in their disengagement with education and then to examine what type of educational programme successfully re-engages these young people with education.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) identified adolescence as an important phase in the young people's development during which they need to learn to take on the responsibilities that adulthood brings and in the context of disaffected learners, to take responsibility for their own behaviour and learning. This transition of young people from childhood to adulthood is important in all young people's lives because their success in the future largely depends on how these transitions are handled both by the young people themselves and the educational institutions they attend. An examination of students' background and reasons for disengagement in the individual case studies in this thesis indicated that not all students have the same support, abilities and aspirations in terms of academic and vocational subjects. If they do not receive the support that they need, if their aspirations are not raised at home or in school then they are unlikely to make a successful transition into further education, training and/or employment and are likely to suffer long-term consequences leading to unemployment and social exclusion.

The great majority of young people manage this transition successfully because they receive support from their homes and school and because they have the motivation and skills necessary to succeed in the adult world. However, the young people who

are the subject of this study have not managed to acquire the skills necessary for employment nor have they received the support they require at home or through the education system. The responses from the student interviews indicated that mainstream schools have not catered for these learners' needs and that the NHP and college environment had a positive impact on students' attainment and educational engagement. These findings have important implications for mainstream schools who could learn from alternative educational providers how to alter their own practices in order to become more inclusive, especially of the young people who experiences SEBD and as a result underachieve.

The young people in this study identified the importance of pastoral care, which was more effective on the NHP than that which they had experienced in their mainstream schools. The understanding of young people's personal circumstances, the problems they were facing and the close relationships with NHP staff were emphasised in students' interviews and in group discussions with the staff as important in helping young people to make successful progress, improve their attainment and enhance their progression to further education. It is precisely these factors that the students described as lacking in their experiences in later progression in college and they identified them as causes of their 'dropping out' from education following the completion of the NHP. Thus, it is important to consider these factors in discussion of the curriculum design for 14-19. The proposition that the 14-19 phase in education should form a unified phase which would allow learners' smooth progression from the secondary to the post-16 stage becomes even more pressing as we are approaching the RPA in 2015. As educators we need to accommodate the needs of all of our learners and the approaches to curriculum ideology and curriculum design that emerge from this ideology are of the utmost importance in implementing appropriate strategies that would engage all young learners. The students in this study identified the curriculum that was offered to them in mainstream schools as irrelevant to their future choice of careers and jobs they wanted to pursue even though the only qualifications they valued were those which were well recognised and precisely those that they had studied in mainstream schools. This indicates that the division between academic and vocational subjects is not helpful in re-engaging these young people with education nor is designing alternative educational programmes. The longer-term solution lies in

a curriculum design that would offer broad academic and vocational subjects including a work-related element, to all learners in their compulsory education.

The examination of the 14-19 education system in England in Chapter 1 in this thesis leaves us in little doubt that the provision of education in this country is guarded by a central government that exerts direct control over education through the establishment and monitoring of objectives and targets, marketisation and competitiveness within education. The research showed that this overemphasis on the importance of performance targets and the allocation of funding which is based on this performance has inevitably led schools to rid themselves of pupils who are underachieving due to their SEBD, leading to their exclusions from mainstream education rather than addressing their SEN. The research also indicated that the quality of schools and performance is poorer in schools in deprived areas. The exclusion of the young people who come from disadvantaged and poorer socio-economic backgrounds leads to the segregation of working-class children and the children of the poor (Tomlinson, 1988; Armstrong, 1995). This segregation was evident in the promotion of 'Learning Support Units (LSUs) (DfEE, 1996) for pupils who found it difficult to access the national curriculum. Although LSUs were designed to support pupils with SEBD, this support separates them from mainstream education for the time they spend there.

The process of inclusion is an important issue as it is ever evolving within the socio-economic structure within which it exists and is one which needs to be addressed by both the LAs and their local schools and colleges. The examination of the LA's role in the documentary evidence in this study showed that this could be achieved by the LA, schools and colleges constructing and operating within an 'inclusive' policy framework in which the key 'actors' understand their respective roles. In this study the policy of inclusion was evident in the partnership work amongst different ecosystems, the LA, mainstream schools and the college. Within the London Borough of East End LA an inclusive framework for providing an alternative education for students who experience SEBD had been established through the implementation and development of the NHP. This framework aimed to develop and support a high quality educational provision to ensure the educational inclusion of all young people.

Ridge (2002: 6) argued that ‘Social exclusion of children could signify much more than exclusion from society as conceived by adults. It may also mean exclusion from the norms and customs of children’s society. In this respect, childhood needs to be seen as a social experience in itself, where the demands of participation and inclusion may be considerable, and likewise the costs of exclusion’. The SEN Code of Practice suggests that ‘Pupils with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties have learning difficulties’ (DfE, 1994b: 58). The Department for Education (DfE, 1994b) provided an extended definition of emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), which recognises the bio-psycho-social and eco-systemic nature of EBD (Cooper, Smith and Upton, 1991; Cooper, 1996). Ofsted’s ‘Principles into Practice Report (1999) confirmed these definitions and cited the Underwood Report (1955) which wrote ‘that EBD/maladjustment was not a medical condition. It is a term describing an individual’s relation at a particular time to the people and circumstances which make up his environment’ (paragraph 9). Based on this view, Ofsted suggested that schools should examine and adapt their organisation, curriculum and support systems to improve the relations between the pupil with EBD and his or her environment. Symbolic interactionism suggests that people attach different meanings to things that surround them and the experiences and events that they encounter. The examination of the meanings that the subjects in this study attached to school, college, staff, curriculum and discipline indicated that offering these young people a second chance in an adult setting in college changed their perceptions of education and enhanced their motivation, self-esteem and attainment. However, the young people who ‘dropped out’ in their subsequent post-16 phase reported the lack of such support on mainstream courses which indicated that an earlier intervention in addressing their disaffection was necessary as well as the continuous support in the post-16 phase. The research showed that an early intervention and support for both parents/carers and pupils proved beneficial in preventing young people from becoming disengaged with education in later years.

Adolescence brings many challenges and changes for young people and when this is coupled with disengagement with education there is a danger that it may lead to social exclusion in adulthood. In 1997 the New Labour Government launched the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) whose aim was to ensure that no-one was excluded from the opportunity to develop their potential. Schools were encouraged to include pupils with

SEBD through the development of a more flexible curriculum for all pupils. As a strategy for school improvement in ensuring the inclusion of all its pupils including those with SEN, the government of the time wanted LAs to work with groups of schools, based on a geographical or other selection (DfEE, 2000). Clark et al. (1999: 163) describe this as the ‘technology of inclusion – a series of systems, structures and procedures for enabling inclusion to occur’. In their case studies of four secondary schools in England with a long history of developing inclusive practice, they found that inclusion is a complex issue and that it presented schools and their staff with a range of challenges. They reported that in one of these schools which ‘was going out of its way to include students with severe and profound learning difficulties, it also formally excluded six students on disciplinary grounds...’. This shows that schools indeed employ different inclusion practices and discriminate against students with SEBD, although the SEN Code of Practice clearly recognised that SEBD constitutes a special education need.

Viewing pupils with behavioural difficulties as ‘deviant’ or ‘difficult’ reverts back to within-child theories implying that the problem is in the individual child. This is in contrast to the research findings in this thesis and the Bronfenbrenner’s eco-systems theory (BEST), which have provided evidence and advocate that the research into educational disengagement must encompass the different systems that surround the developing young person. Schools and colleges as immediate settings and educational institutions play a crucial role in young people’s lives and have a responsibility to adapt their practices to meet the individual needs of their population and to respond to local needs. Thus, the LAs and the educational institutions in the most deprived areas need to ensure that they offer the most suitable and high quality educational provision for their vulnerable young people. OFSTED (2005) suggested that collaboration between schools and LA support services enables schools to include a greater diversity of pupils in mainstream schools. The New Labour government promoted integrated, multi-agency services for children, which would bring together practitioners in health, education, social services, law, youth work and child welfare (DfES, 1998). This was evident in the legislative framework of ‘Every Child Matters’ (DfES, 2003a), which required the adoption of child-centred holistic policies and placed responsibility for ensuring the well-being of all children on all those who are involved in working with the children, including the educationalists, health and social



services. The Children Act 2004 empowered LAs to take a leadership role to set up arrangements to promote cooperation between different local partners (DfES, 2004e).

The New Labour government's 'aim was for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they needed to be: healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make positive contribution and achieve economic well-being' (ECM, 2003b). Good as these policies sound and their successful implementation in the Borough of East End as shown in this research, the New Labour government failed to abolish the division of academic and vocational education and to introduce a coherent 14-19 education system based on unification of the curriculum. The students' views in this study indicated that the curriculum and its delivery in mainstream schools was problematic and that they needed to be offered opportunities to study vocational subjects coupled with work-related elements whilst they were in mainstream schools. This might have produced better outcomes for them and prevented their exclusion from mainstream education. Furthermore, successive governments' commitment to league tables and performance targets left the destiny of those young people who challenge the educational system in mainstream schools unchanged and at risk of being excluded from it. The examination of students' background and causes of disaffection and disengagement in different cohorts in this study confirmed this and indicated that the reasons for exclusions and referrals to the NHP remained unchanged, as did the numbers of students who were referred to the NHP in any given year. The change was only seen when the GCSE exams were replaced on the NHP with the new qualifications, which were unknown to students and their parents. This resulted in schools referring more students who had learning difficulties and mental health issues alongside SEBD to the NHP. The fact that both parents and students only attach value to the curriculum that is on offer in mainstream schools indicates that there is a need for the development of a coherent and progressive curriculum design for 14-19 year olds which would cater for the needs of all learners. Higham and Yeomans (2011:220) criticised the Coalition Government's disinterest in the concept of a 14-19 phase and their focus on 'toughening-up' GCSEs and A levels as constituent parts of the system while only reviewing vocational education. They considered that this structural divide between 'the relatively broad 14-16 curriculum and the narrow, specialised post-16 curriculum' has been problematic inhibiting the development of a 14-19 phase. However, with the raising of the participation age to

18, this structural barrier will be removed which might rejuvenate the idea of a unified 14-19 curriculum in an attempt to retain and ensure clear progression routes for those vulnerable young people who are disengaged with education, training or employment and would otherwise become NEET.

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

The evaluation of the NHP, as an alternative educational provision implemented and developed within an FE college, aimed to investigate its effectiveness in terms of students' re-engagement with education and their progression into the then post-compulsory phase. It was mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis that evaluation studies which examine the quality of education in alternative educational provisions need to adopt a comprehensive framework which examines different aspects of such programmes from the perspective of the subjects they study. The symbolic interactionism perspective on which this study is based suggests that people act towards things according to the meanings they attach to them. In order to examine the meanings that young people attach to different systems and how they perceive the influences of these different systems on their educational experiences, as well as to achieve the comprehensiveness of this evaluation study, young people's voices needed to be heard. In addition to the perspectives of the young people, it was also important to examine those of the staff that worked closely with the young people on the implementation and development of the NHP. This approach to the research revealed the importance of each of the different eco-systems that influence the development of these young people.

This study has demonstrated the possible beneficial effects of an alternative approach to pastoral care, curriculum design and delivery, pedagogy and discipline. It has also suggested that by changing their approach mainstream schools could prevent more young people from becoming disaffected within these institutions in the first instance and thus being excluded from them.

The study indicates that colleges play an important role in accommodating young people who fail in mainstream education and in re-engaging young people in

education, thus allowing them to successfully progress in post-compulsory education, training or/and employment and preventing them from becoming socially excluded. There were many aspects of good practices recorded on the NHP. This study has show the importance of evaluating these types of programme so that improvements can be made to them and of sharing good practice so that lessons can be learnt for the future development and implementation of alternative educational programmes where these are necessary.

Based on these research findings and an examination of the education system for 14-19 year olds in England, I suggested in Chapter 9 that changes needed to be made in each eco-system if we are to ensure the educational inclusion of all young people and provide them with the qualifications and employability skills that would help to secure their future employment and prevent them from becoming NEET. Maintaining the division between academic and vocational pathways, whilst giving preference to academic qualifications, is likely to have a negative impact on young people who are, like the subjects of this study, not motivated or interested in studying the academic subjects offered within this framework. This in turn has important implications for the implementation of the RPA to the age of 18 and the curriculum that will be offered within it. The idea of a unified system of qualifications, which has so far been largely neglected by the Coalition Government, is likely to re-surface once again in the educational debate. Thus, the problem of disengagement with education is likely to provoke further re-organisation and re-structuring of the 14-19 curriculum and qualifications. Recently, the independent Skills Taskforce published its interim report *Qualifications matter: improving the curriculum and assessment for all* (2013) which explores what role the qualifications and curriculum provision play in overall effectiveness of the system. The report outlined,

‘a realistic and deliverable strategy for radically improving the efficiency, effectiveness and usability of our 14-19 qualifications and curriculum structure through practical measures that can make a credible and real difference to the quality of provision available to young people’ (pg. 1).

This study shows that apart from a different approach to the 14-19 curriculum, careful consideration needs to be given to pastoral care, pedagogy, assessment and an individualised approach to teaching and learning within educational institutions. This needs to be adapted to suit the requirements of the local cohort, as well as being part of an overall approach to curriculum ideology that provides the basis for the structure and organisation of the 14-19 education system in England.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The main limitation of this study was the failure to examine the reasons why some young people ‘dropped out’ from the NHP or later on in the post-16 phase. It also failed to examine the views of the referral and other external agencies such as schools, Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), LA representative which would have offered yet another perspective on the implementation, development and improvements to the NHP. Thus, an area for future research could be to follow up all the students who were referred to the NHP and to include the extreme cases in the study. This would offer a fuller picture of educational disengagement and possibly the identification of additional aspects that could be implemented on the NHP and even wider within the LA, to improve educational participation and achievement.

This study has also been limited in terms of the resources and biases of a single researcher, although my role as an insider researcher and biases that could be associated with my role were hoped to be minimised through the adoption of open communication with all research participants and their involvement in the study from its outset. The limited financial resources and being a single researcher meant that I could not follow up all the students that enrolled on the NHP earlier, from the academic years 2004/5 - 2007/8 as I was unable to contact them. Collecting data on the total cohort might have altered some of the findings in the student questionnaires. Since this study is a case study on a relatively small cohort, future research needs to concentrate on examining all students’ views and experiences so that a more accurate picture can be painted. However, the responses in student questionnaires and interviews did show consistency from which important themes and conclusions were drawn.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has evaluated an alternative educational provision and examined the extent to which each eco-system played its part in young people's disengagement with education from the perspective of different stakeholders with an interest in the NHP. Although this study was based on one case, it has examined in depth how one alternative educational provision was conceived and developed to support young people who experience SEBD. In comparing the commonalities of findings from evaluations of other AEPs, it indicated that similar practices, in terms of pastoral care, pedagogy, discipline and individualised approaches to learning, were employed on these provisions which had been shown to be effective in re-engaging young people with education.

The Coalition Government has introduced cuts to local authority and schools' budgets and closed hundreds of Sure Start Centres which provided young children and families with support (Day Care Trust, 2012), thus preventing the most vulnerable young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds from having the best start in life. In 2010 the Coalition government announced that the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which offered weekly finance to students from low-income families who continued into full-time, post-compulsory education, would be scrapped. This decision was in direct opposition to the Coalition government's education policy rhetoric which centres around fairness and equality of opportunity for all pupils, irrespective of their social background, since the scrapping of the EMA had implications for the aspirations of young people from the poorest families. The great majority of students on the NHP who are the subject of this study had relied on receiving the EMA in order to be able to continue their education post-16. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS, 2005) evaluated the successfulness of the EMA pilot implementation and compared students in nine urban LAs who were eligible for EMA to students from nine LAs, where students were not entitled to EMA, but which were similar in terms of participation rates and geographical proximity. They found that the scheme was successful in increasing participation and retention rates in post-16 education.

Since the Coalition Government took office youth unemployment has risen to over a million and IPPR (2012) figures showed that 1, 012, 000 young people were NEET. High levels of unemployment among young people will not only have undesirable consequences for the young people themselves but also for society and the economy as a whole.

The changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum, which introduced more academic subjects, are likely to have a negative impact on the retention and educational outcomes for the young people who experience SEBD and are disengaged from mainstream education once the RPA comes fully into force.

Fuller and Unwin (2011) criticised the Wolf Report, which reviewed the vocational qualifications for 14-19 year olds, for giving little space to the opinions of those who are involved in educating young people and for not providing clear guidelines on how these qualifications are to be reformed.

Higham and Yeomans (2011: 223) argued that ‘the notion that directing learners into pathways at age 14 will improve retention, achievement and progression has achieved support within schools and colleges being seen as a means of catering to different abilities and aptitudes’. The research findings and the examination of students’ retention, attendance and achievement in this study confirmed this view. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate has been criticised as ‘a narrow, regressive measure which unjustifiably devalues knowledge not covered by the subjects which are included in the ‘EBacc’ (Higham and Yeomans, 2011).

The findings in this study indicated that the young people were more motivated to study academic subjects when they studied these subjects alongside vocational subjects, which provide clearer pathways towards the careers they wanted to pursue. This provides evidence that the young people who are disengaged with the curriculum offered in mainstream schools, would benefit from studying vocational subjects in KS4. Offering a broader curriculum that includes a mixture of academic, vocational and work-related subjects with clear curricular pathways from the age of 14 would enable learners’ smoother progression to the post-16 phase when they have to make choices about more specialised courses which lead to their desired careers.

Whatever approach is taken by the government, it is clear that the current education system in England suffers from deep inequalities which do not provide equal chances of progression for all learners and that the education system for 14-19 year olds needs to be reformed and made more coherent to be accessible for all. Their fundamental obligation is to prepare these young learners to lead productive and prosperous lives in their adulthood.

Word count: 75 101

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 - Group discussions with the NHP staff

#### Group discussion 1 topic guide

Rationale for the study

Research questions

Staff involvement – ethical issues

Data collection – type of evidence

Reporting of findings

Open communication

#### Group discussion 2 topic guide

Findings from documentary evidence

The NHP: processes, inputs, outcomes

The NHP: strengths and weaknesses

The NHP: outcomes for students

Student questionnaire

Further data collection

#### Seminar with staff

Reporting findings

Themes emerging from data collection on the NHP

## APPENDIX 2 – CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

### **An Evaluation of an Alternative Educational Programme for Year 11 Students Excluded from Mainstream Education**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Magdalena Cajic-Seigneur, a student at the Institute of Education, University of London.

If you have any further questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to email me on [mcajic@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:mcajic@ioe.ac.uk)

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

I would like to know whether the New Horizons Programme has a positive impact on students' achievement and progress. I also wish to find out what happens to these young people after they leave the Programme.

#### **PROCEDURES**

Statistical data will be collected on all students who have attended the Programme in academic years 2004/5 to 2011/12. If you decide to participate in this study, I would ask you to complete a questionnaire and if selected to participate in an interview. I will ask questions about your educational experience while attending the Programme, your career choices and your suggestions how the Programme can be improved.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

This research is intended to help schools, colleges and Local Authority to improve the educational provision for all 14-19 year olds in this Borough and to support these young people to progress successfully to further education, employment and training.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

#### **PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS**

You decide if you want to take part in this research. Even if you decide to participate in this research, you can drop out at any time or refuse to answer some questions.

#### **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/PARENT or CARER**

I have read the information provided for this study as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (please print) and Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (please print) and Signature of Parent/Carer (if applicable) Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2 - The New Horizons Programme Students' Questionnaire

1. How was your experience of education during the time you attended the New Horizons Programme?

Excellent                  Good                          Average                          Poor                  Very poor

2. How would you rate the general atmosphere in the College in motivating you and helping you to achieve and progress (e.g. lessons within other departments in college, other teachers and staff in college, out-of-classroom activities etc)?

Excellent                  Good                          Average                          Poor                  Very poor

3. Overall, how was the teachers' ability to motivate you to learn?

Excellent                  Good                          Average                          Poor                  Very poor

4. How did the course on the New Horizons Programme prepare you for your future education or training?

Excellent                  Good                          Average                          Poor                  Very poor

5. How would you rate the relevance of the qualifications you achieved on the New Horizons Programme to your employment?

Excellent                  Good                          Average                          Poor                  Very poor

6. How would you rate the help and support you received from the teaching and learning support staff on the New Horizons Programme?

Excellent                  Good                          Average                          Poor                  Very poor

7. How was the behaviour of students managed by the staff on the New Horizons Programme?

Excellent                  Good                          Average                          Poor                  Very poor

8. Please say whether you have benefited from attending the New Horizons Programme and why.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. In your opinion, what are the main strengths of the New Horizons Programme?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What are the main weaknesses of the New Horizons Programme?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. In your opinion, how can the New Horizons Programme be improved for the new students (eg. subjects, discipline, staff, teaching resources etc)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. What did you do after completing the New Horizons Programme (another course, training, employment)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. Are you in education, training or employment at the moment?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. Please add any other comments you would like to make about the New Horizons Programme.

I would like to thank you for taking your time to fill this questionnaire. It shall help the programme staff and management to improve the New Horizons Programme.

## Appendix 3

### Interview guide for semi-structured interviews with students

Student's background

Reasons for exclusion

Any other issues relevant to disengagement

Experiences at school and college

The NHP: Strengths, weaknesses and improvements

## Appendix 4

### Interview guide for semi-structured interviews with the NHP heads

Background and experience

FE context

The effectiveness of the NHP

Internal and external influences on the NHP

Themes emerging from data collection on the NHP

The NHP: Strengths, weaknesses and improvements

## School Referral Form

***Please complete all the sections of this form to the best of your knowledge and as thoroughly as possible.***

***Thank you.***

**Referral**

**School.....**

.

**Name of Main Contact**

**Person.....**

**Job title..... Contact Tel. No.**

### Section 1 – Young person's Information & Contact Details

Young person's  
name.....

Young person's D.O.B.....

Gender.....

Ethnicity of young person ..... Mother Tongue.....

Unique Pupil Number ..... Existing Year Group .....

Full Name of Parent/Carer

.....

Relationship to Young Person

.....

Young person's

address.....

.....

Home Tel. or Mob. No.

Email Address

.....

## Section 2 – Attendance and Young Person’s Details

### Attendance and Timekeeping

Please give details of previous year’s attendance data

1. Attendance.....%
2. Authorised Absence.....%.
3. Unauthorised absence.....%
4. Lateness .....%

Is the young person on a Full Timetable? Yes/No **(Please Circle)**

If No, please give details

.....  
.....  
.....

Has the young person ever been excluded? No/Yes – when and why?

### Behaviour

How would you describe the young person’s behaviour/attitude towards:

Staff:

Other students:

Learning:



## Health

Does the young person suffer from any known health problems or have a disability?

No/ Yes – please provide details

## Section 3 – Learning Predictions

Please attach a copy of young person's KS3 SATS results if available

Please indicate the predicted grade or level the student is expected to achieve within the following subjects:

English

Mathematics

ICT

Are there any other subjects that the student has an interest in continuing with or would like the opportunity to study at the college?

## Section 4 - Learning Support Requirements

Does this young person receive free school meals?                      Yes    No

Has the young person been assessed as having Special Educational Needs?  
Yes/No.

**If yes, please provide copy of Statement of Educational Needs.**

Please name the school contact:

**SEN Stages:** Please circle young person's SEN Status and, below, why this measure was taken:

**School Action**

**School Action Plus**

**Statement**

**None**

Please provide details on special needs including any additional support currently in place (e.g. one to one support, Educational Psychologist support, etc.)

Please confirm whether the young person has:

- A Personal Education Plan (PEP)? Yes/No. If yes, please supply a copy.
- A CAF. If yes, please supply a copy.

An Individual Education Plan (IEP)? Yes/No. If yes, please supply a copy.

Please indicate any other supporting services/agencies involved. If the officer's name and contact details are known, please provide them.

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Looked After Children Education Service | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Careers/Connexions PA                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community PA                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Police/Youth Justice Board              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child Protection Referral               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teenage Pregnancy Service               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Social Services                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Youth Service                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Educational Psychology Services         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Youth Offending Team                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Access & Attendance Services            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Agency (Please give details)      | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Please keep a photocopy for your records.

Contact Person's Name

.....

Contact Person's

Signature.....

Contact Person's Email Address

.....

Contact Person's Tel./Fax No.

.....

Date.....

....

**Section 5**  
**Selection Interview Decision – To be completed by an authorized member of staff.**

Successful                       Unsuccessful

Please note the reason for your decision:

.....

Conditional                       Unconditional

Please specify any conditions agreed .....

Interviewer's Signature ..... Position.....

Additional information

APPENDIX 6 – STUDENT PERSONAL FILE

**ATTAINMENT / ACHIEVEMENT ...YYYY/YY**

<b>Student</b> .....	<b>School</b> .....
<b>Programme</b> .....	<b>Tutor</b> .....

<b>Diagnostic Test Results</b>		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Comments</b>

<b>Prior School Attainment</b>					
<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Results</b>				
	<b>KS2</b>		<b>KS3</b>		<b>Pred.KS4</b>
	<b>TA</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>TA</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>Grades</b>
<b>English</b>					
<b>Maths</b>					
<b>Science</b>					

**Key:**  
**KS2 = Key Stage 2**  
**KS3 = Key Stage 3**  
**Pred. KS4 = Predicted Key Stage 4**  
**TA = Teacher Assessment**  
**Test = KS2 and KS3 test results (SATs)**

<b>Initial Targets</b>
1. 2. 3. 4.

## STUDENT FILE CONTENTS

Student..... Form Tutor .....

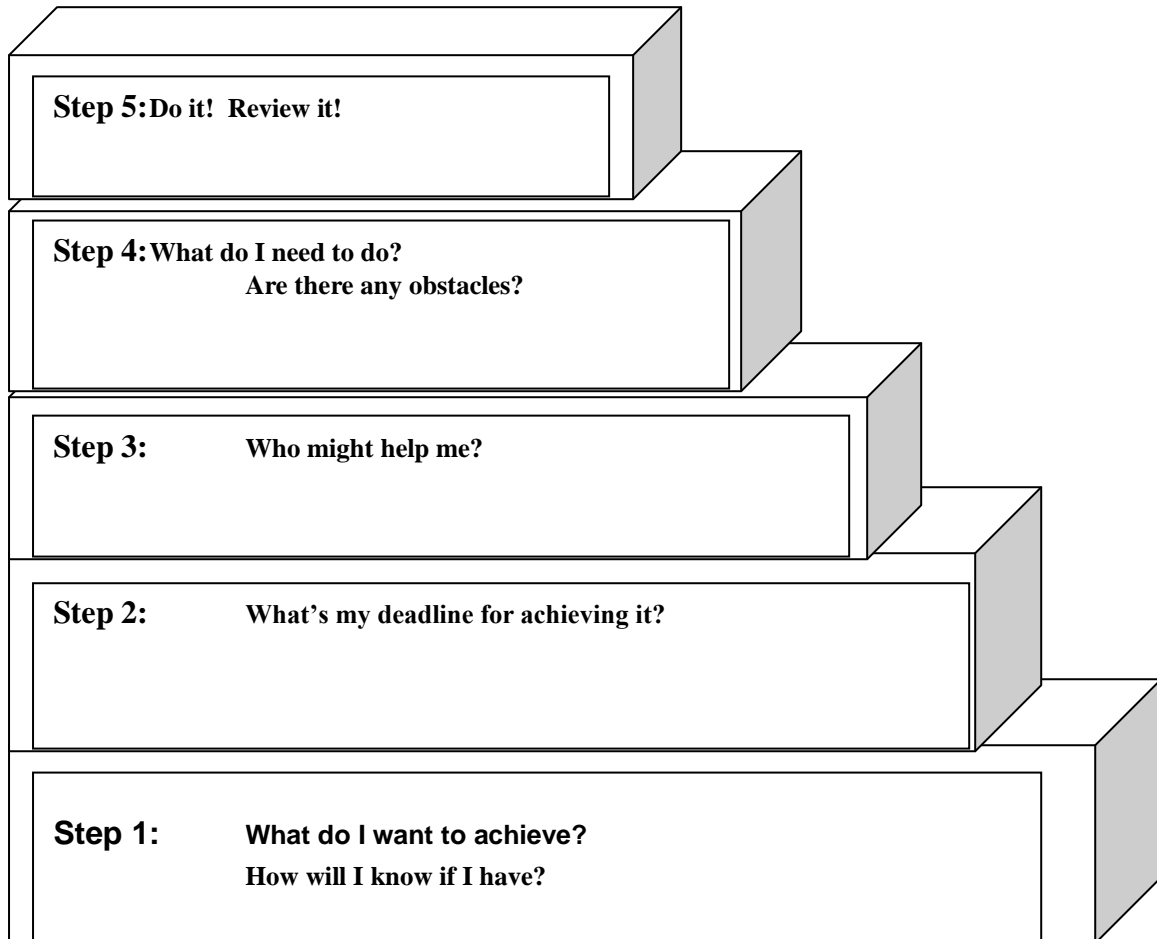
Course ..... Start date:

Documents	Tick Box	Comment
<b>Authorisation for Off-Site Activity (Parental Consent)</b>		
<b>Home School Agreement</b>		
<b>Learning Contract</b>		
<b>Contract details form</b>		
<b>Medical form</b>		
<b>SEN details</b>		
<b>Additional Support file</b>		
<b>Timetable</b>		
<b>Telephone message pro forma</b>		
<b>Individual Learning Plan – self assessment</b>		
<b>Student progress review</b> <b>1 2 3 4 5 6</b>		
<b>School file received</b>		
<b>Individual risk assessment (if applicable)</b>		
<b>Other documents</b>		

## Turning your goals into action:

My goal for ..... term is:

.....



Tutor's review (e.g. student progress towards identified goal, next steps etc.):

## Progress Review – Action Planner

Date:

Previously set target	Outcome	Further steps
<b>Student's comments</b>		
<b>Tutor's signature</b>		
<b>Student's signature</b>		